

Houston Graduate School of Theology

**Development of a Safe Space for Grief Recovery through  
Preaching and Teaching at Humble Praise Center**

A Project Report Submitted to the Faculty for Students in  
Candidacy for the Degree of Doctor Ministry

By

Tammy M. Isaac

May 14, 2022

**Development of a Safe Space for Grief Recovery through  
Preaching and Teaching at Humble Praise Center**

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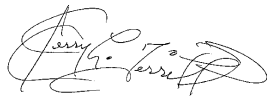
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A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'T. Isaac', is positioned above a horizontal line.

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Tammy M. Isaac

## **Acknowledgements**

This body of work is dedicated to my beloved mother, Theresa I. Lewis, my father, Jack Coleman, and my nephew, Franklin Devone Telemaque, all of whom are deceased, but each of whom made an impact on my research and work with grief today. To my grandmother, Disney James, whose passing allowed me to experience grief for the first time when I was just a little girl. To my good friend, Likeythia Blackmon, with whom I have had the privilege to journey, creating safe space for her, giving her permission and time to grieve in the dark night of her soul. To my hospice patients and their families, it has been my pleasure to sojourn with you through your journey of grief, providing spiritual and emotional support. I am honored to enter into that sacred space with you. And, most importantly, to my siblings, Heather, Frank, Jemma, and Timmy, who grieve along with me for the loss of our mother.

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## **Preface**

This project was developed to create safe spaces within Humble Praise Center (hereafter HPC) for grief support and grief recovery through preaching and teaching on the topic of grief. This project was birthed out of a lack of understanding of the importance of grief recovery in the local church. The problem was realized when personal space to grieve was not allowed within the community of which the student was a part at the time of her grief. As a result, the need for a congregational safe space and healthy response for grieving was recognized and became the basis for this project. The completion of the project allowed HPC to understand and acknowledge that grief is the inevitable process that human beings will experience as the result of a loss at some point in their lives and the journey demands the attention of the local church. With that understanding, HPC now creates safe spaces where the congregation as a whole is able to provide permission, time, and support to those who are grieving.

## **Abstract**

This project encouraged HPC leaders to understand the importance of grief support and recovery with their community. This group participated in four weeks of training about grief and the healthy process of grieving. Alongside this training, the congregation was included in a sermon series which highlighted biblical characters who grieved. The teaching and preaching helped them to understand grief as a normal part of life, demanding their attention and allowing them to create safe spaces to minister to the bereaved within their community. Statistical measurements revealed increased knowledge about and effective handling of needs related to grief within the community.

## **Chapter I**

### **Introduction**

Life has its ups and downs and its gains and losses, all of which are expected as part of the natural human balance of life. But when the scale tips more to the side of downs and losses, leading one into a journey of grief, life can seem unbearable. Journeying through grief is a hard task, takes time, and should not be done alone. The bereaved will need the help and support of their community to process through the journey as they take a new narrative into their lives. Sometimes, the person does not know how to navigate the journey and will need someone to lead the way. Grief tends to be a lonely place, though it was never meant to be. Grief is normal and healthy, and grieving people should honor these feelings of loss. They need loved ones to listen to them when they want to talk about their loss and to hold them when they feel overcome by emotions.

Grief is also disruptive and disorienting. Some people will make griever feel like they are overreacting to the death of their loved ones. This happens only until loss is personally experienced due to the death of someone with whom there was deep, emotional investment. Grief is the price to pay when one loves another person intently. Grief is deep sorrow; it is the emotion that one feels after experiencing a deep loss of any person, place, or thing. The lack of understanding of the importance of grief recovery in the local church is an overlooked problem. The problem was realized, by this writer,

when personal time and space to grieve was not allowed while part of a church community and staff, working in full-time ministry for that church community.

In 2012, when the only one ever known as father died, the senior pastor at the church of employment said that “he was not your real father.” In other words, just because he was not the biological father, there should not be grieving. Bereavement days off from work were not offered but were taken anyway. One intercessor on the prayer team even said, “Oh, you will be alright, I’m not worried about you,” upon asking the group for prayer. The senior pastor continued to give preaching assignments during the grieving process.

Four years since Father’s death, caretaking commenced for Mother, who had Congestive Heart Failure and went through a series of hospitalizations and code blues. The stress of caring for Mother, working full time in ministry, self-care, and working on the doctorate caused additional grieving. During this time, anticipatory grief was experienced, along with anxiety, denial, and anger. When Mother passed, similar work situations happened, just as had been the case with Father’s passing. Ministry work and leading the ministry team were expected to continue. Physical health challenges were experienced, leading to admission to the hospital a month after Mother’s passing. The doctors first thought it was a heart attack, but, after an overnight stay at the hospital and several tests, it was revealed to be great anxiety, which then led to depression a few years later and therapy. In a staff meeting two months after Mother’s death, the senior pastor said, “Even though your mother has died, I still have a church to run, and you need to be focused.” In addition, the writer’s oldest sister had a heart attack, two aunts (Mother’s

sisters) passed away, and her hometown in Marigot, Dominica, was destroyed during a hurricane.

The decision was then made, following the counsel of four people, who were admired, trusted, and respected, to resign from that church. The realization was that it was time to focus on mental and physical health, granting the permission, time, and space to grieve. A handful of people in that community were sensitive to the grief and sought to be supportive. Much of the leadership team, however, and members of the community simply did not understand the importance of creating a sacred space for members to grieve with support. They lacked the understanding of what grief is and how to care for those who grieve. The lack of support during the grief journey not only caused additional emotional, physical, and mental stress, but it also initiated some self-reflection on how, in turn, had others been treated previously during their grief journeys. As a result, the need for a congregational safe space and healthy response for grieving was recognized and became the basis for this project.

### **Project Measurable Outcomes**

To recap, the subject of this study was to create a safe space for grief recovery and to discover how preaching and teaching on the topic of grief could be nurtured at all levels in the local church and into the community. The importance of this study was to help the church community acknowledge that grief is the inevitable process that human beings will experience due to loss at some point in their lives and that the journey of grief demands attention in the local church. The project took select members of the community through a study of defining grief, the history of how grief has been handled in the church, and how the church should respond to those who are grieving. The desire was to see the

church community create a safe space through small groups where the community as a whole would be able to minister effectively to those who were grieving.

The project's educational impact was dependent upon involving the congregation in a four-week preaching series on grief and the healthy process of grieving. Spotlighting biblical characters, who experienced times of grief, would help them understand that grief is a normal part of life that demands attention. With this awareness, they, in turn, would be able to create sacred spaces to minister to others who are grieving.

Statistical measurements would tally percentages of members involved and engaged in the sermon series and their responses to creating space for those who grieve. In addition, a four-week class was planned to train a group of twelve potential small group leaders on how to lead grief recovery groups and how to create sacred spaces for those who grieve. The main target group for this study was preachers, teachers, and leaders in the church community. Statistical measurements using SurveyMonkey.com would then reveal the number of leaders trained in the grief recovery process and the levels of understanding of the many facets of grief in order to prepare them to lead small grief recovery groups.

The project's congregational impact was to involve ten percent of Humble Praise Center (HPC) members in a small grief recovery group. One goal was to create safe spaces, such as grief recovery groups, one-on-one grief counseling, workshops, and a prayer space, in order to be present with those who grieve, worship with them, and comfort them. Another goal was to increase knowledge and awareness of the effective handling of grief in safe spaces. Pre- and post-project surveys would be given to reveal

how the sermon series and small group leader training helped to impact the development of sacred spaces within HPC.

### **Conclusion**

Christians need permission, time, and space to grieve genuinely and unapologetically, but they also need the support of their communities as they journey through grief. They need their church communities to walk with them, sharing in their pain. The weight of grief is much lighter when it can be shared with others. Having the support of those in one's community can help one handle the deep sorrow felt from loss. Giving someone the permission to grieve is one of the most valuable gifts one can give. Beyond providing for funerals, meals, and flowers, there is much more that the church community can do when they are educated on how to support those who grieve.

HPC did not have a sacred space for grief recovery or an effective working knowledge on how to minister to those who are grieving within their community. This project aimed at helping HPC create sacred spaces within the community so that no one would be left to grieve alone or in silence, to develop a bereavement ministry, and to design support-oriented small groups, empowering the church to be a safe place where everyone's grief is met with compassion. The report now turns to foundational resources which informed the project's direction.

## **Chapter II**

### **Biblical, Theological, and Practical Foundations of Grief, Pastoral Care, and Sacred Spaces**

Death is not a popular theme in conversations today; it is not a subject that many people find fulfilling when discussed. Usually, one walks away from a conversation about death with feelings of depression and unhappiness. “That’s why it’s a subject of so many euphemisms. Instead of using the word ‘dead,’ one will say, ‘passed away,’ ‘returned home,’ ‘gone to a better place,’ ‘sleeping in Jesus,’ or ‘went to be with the Lord.’”<sup>1</sup> It seems that there is a hesitation about coming to grips with one’s impending death. People would rather avoid any discussion about it; after all, death is a depressing subject, and who wants to be depressed?

On the edge of the University of Oregon campus lies a sizable historical cemetery. For years university officials have eyed with envy this valuable slice of real estate that divides their campus. At one point some even entertained suggestions to build a superstructure of above-ground buildings over the plots! For many students, the cemetery represents an unfortunate obstacle as they crisscross the campus from one class to the next. . . . What better reminder for young people seeking to fashion lifelong values? Contemplation of death gives [one] the wisdom to live.<sup>2</sup>

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1. Keith Krell, “Living While You Live,” Bible.org, accessed June 13, 2019, <http://bible.org/seriespage/living-while-you-live-ecclesiastes-91-12>.

2. “What Meaning Does Death Bring to Life?” InterVarsity Press (June 13, 2013), accessed June 13, 2019, <https://www.ivpress.com/Contents/Item/Display/35492>.



Life has so many seemingly wonderful things that make it easy to forget that death is soon to come. It would be good, however, to look at death as a healthy wake-up call to the reality that will eventually affect every human life.

Death for many people is traumatizing, and a “traumatic suffering [which] turns off feelings, depletes the body, and deadens the spirit. A state of shock automatically locks up the mind and emotion, knowing and affect.”<sup>3</sup> Death is considered a gloomy subject, let alone having to deal with the actual experience of a loved one who has died or is dying. “Death is personified, creeping through windows, entering the palaces, indiscriminately leaving a mark on young, old, male and female, rich and poor.”<sup>4</sup> The death of a loved one is one of the most severe stressors imaginable. When someone loses a loved one, they inevitably experience the emotions of grief.

Grief is a normal process that all human beings will experience as the result of a loss at some point in their life, and the journey of grief demands attention. “Having faith does not preclude [anyone] from experiencing the process of grief. It means they have a relationship with God to lean onto or lean into as [they] process [their] loss.”<sup>5</sup> This means that believers have the right and are expected to journey through grief at some point in their lives. Grief expert Melissa Kelley affirms,

Many characters in Scripture have spoken poignantly about their grief [experiences]. For example, Job expressed his deep pain in these words: “My eyes have grown dim from grief, and all my members are like a shadow” (Job 17:7).

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3. Kathleen M. O’Connor, *Jeremiah: Pain and Promise* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2012), 59.

4. L Juliana M. Claassens, *Mourner, Mother, Midwife: Reimagining God's Delivering Presence in the Old Testament* (Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press, 2012), 21.

5. Jennifer A. McBride, “What Do We Do with All This Grief?” *Journal for Preachers* 44, no. 2 (Lent 2021): 32–38, accessed June 13, 2019, <http://search.ebscohost.com/login.aspx?direct=true&db=rft&AN=ATLAIACO210111000998&site=ehost-live>.

Likewise, the prophet Jeremiah expressed his deep pain: “My joy is gone, grief is upon me, my heart is sick” (Jer 8:18). Multiple psalms express the raw pain of grief. For example, in Ps 6:7 [one] hear[s] “My eyes waste away because of grief; they grow weak because of my foes.” The psalmist pleads with God in Ps 31:9: “Be gracious to me, O Lord, for I am in distress, my eyes waste away from grief, my soul and body also.” In Ps 10:14, [the] psalmist’s hope and trust [is] that God responds to those in grief: “But you do see! Indeed you note trouble and grief, that you may take it into your hands; the helpless commit themselves to you; you have been the helper of the orphan.”<sup>6</sup>

Grief cannot be prevented in one’s life, and “if it can’t be prevented in one another, then what can [one] do? What can [be done] other than try to remind one another that some things cannot be fixed, and not all wounds are meant to heal. [People] need each other to remember, to help each other remember, that grief is this multitasking emotion that [one] can and will be sad and happy.”<sup>7</sup> To journey effectively through grief with a healthy outcome, the journey cannot be taken alone.

In the body of Christ, believers are taught according to Rom. 12:15 that they are “to rejoice with those who rejoice,” and they are also called “to weep with those who weep.” As believers grow in their relationships with the Father, their hearts are being transformed to that of the Father’s. “When Hagar lifted up her voice in the wilderness of Beersheba, God drew near (Gen. 21:17). When Hannah wept bitterly outside the temple of the Lord, God noticed and remembered (1 Sam. 1:10, 17). When David became weary with moaning, God did not become weary with listening (Ps. 6:6–9).”<sup>8</sup> God’s heart is filled with compassion for those who are not just rejoicing, but also for those who are

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6. Melissa M. Kelley, *Grief: Contemporary Theory and the Practice of Ministry* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2010), 32–3.

7. Nora McInerny, “Ted,” TED, accessed September 10, 2019, [https://www.ted.com/talks/nora\\_mcinerny\\_we\\_don\\_t\\_move\\_on\\_from\\_grief\\_we\\_move\\_forward\\_with\\_it/transcript](https://www.ted.com/talks/nora_mcinerny_we_don_t_move_on_from_grief_we_move_forward_with_it/transcript).

8. Scott Hubbard, “What God Says to Your Tears,” DesiringGod.org (March 8, 2018), accessed September 10, 2019, <https://www.desiringgod.org/articles/what-god-says-to-your-tears>.

mourning. Thus, if the hearts of believers are being transformed to the heart of God, then they, too, must be filled with compassion for those who are not just rejoicing but also for those who mourn (grieve).

Congregations do an incredible job of responding to families at the time of a death. Church members bring food to the home and to the funeral meal. [They] attend the visitation and the funeral service and send sympathy cards offering thoughts and prayers. [They] visit the family in the days following the service. [They] are family to the families in the church experiencing crisis. Then, as families do, [they] get busy with [their] lives, things seem to return to normal, and the bereaved often face the ongoing challenges of mourning and grief with little attention or support.<sup>9</sup>

Christians need permission, time, and space to grieve genuinely and unapologetically, and they also need the support of their communities as they journey through their grief. “Many churches do not have a plan on how to support those who have suffered a loss. This is not done intentionally. It is more a case of benign neglect.”<sup>10</sup> Therefore, the subject of this study is the development of a safe space for grief recovery and how preaching on the topic of grief helps to nurture safe spaces that will allow the people within the community of HPC the opportunity to journey through their grief with the support of their community.

Observation has revealed that there is a lack of knowledge and understanding about the meaning of grief, the importance of grief recovery, and the support needed in the community of HPC. Several members and leaders within the community have faced the inevitable process of grief that human beings experience as the result of a loss,

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9. Helen Harris, “What Is a Congregation to Do? Grief in Family and Congregational Life,” *Journal of Family Ministry* 17, no. 2 (Summer 2003), accessed October 12, 2019, <https://www.baylor.edu/content/services/document.php/92007.pdf>.

10. Philip Kenyon, “Why We Fail the Grieving,” *Christianity Today* (April 6, 2015), accessed October 12, 2019, <https://www.christianitytoday.com/pastors/2015/april-online-only/why-we-fail-grieving.html>.

whether it be the loss of a job, relationship, house, loved one, pet, or even finances. As they journeyed through their grief, the observation was that they were not allowed the time, support, or space for grief recovery. As a result, the need for a congregational safe space and healthy response for grieving was recognized and is the basis for this project.

## Grief

Grief is an important experience that all human beings inevitably will experience in their lifetime. “Grief is an emotion that deserves respect and reverence—almost a sacred feeling which we hate to see distorted by other, more human emotions.”<sup>11</sup> Alan Wolfelt affirms, “Grief is not something [one] choose[s] or not choose. Rather, it is in [one’s] wiring. It is the normal and necessary journey [people] embark on after something [they] have valued no longer exist.”<sup>12</sup>

Grief is the price to pay when one allows oneself to love another person or hold dear something in their heart. McBride lists some of the losses and causes of grief:

Death of a Loved One, Miscarriage, Separation, Abortion, Divorce, Position, Pets, Title, Things, Just leaving, Fire, Theft, Misplacement, Argument, Graduating, Distance, Tasks, Skills, Family changes, Elections, Aging, Heritage, Roots, Reputation, Culture, Leadership, Job/Career, Retiring, Success, Changing, Failure, Promotion, Change, Demotion, Challenge, Closing out, Co-workers, Fertility, Location (moving), Beauty, Identity, Responsibility, Terminal illness, Goals, Faculties, Dreams, Vision, Time, Speech, Structure, Taste, Freedom, Sexuality, Independence, Bodily controls, Country, Surgery, Money, Body parts, Teeth, Growing up, Projects, Marriages, Teachers, Births, Beliefs, Values,

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11. Clemens E. Benda (Ernst), “Bereavement and Grief Work,” *The Journal of Pastoral Care* 16, no. 1 (Spr 1962): 2, accessed March 8, 2019, <http://search.ebscohost.com/login.aspx?direct=true&db=rft&AN=ATLA0000682505&site=ehost-live>.

12. Alan Wolfelt, “Grief,” Center for Loss and Life Transition, accessed March 8, 2019, <http://www.centerforloss.com/grief/>.

Leaders, Self-esteem, Schools, Youth, Lifestyle, Childhood, Faith, Health, Control, Toys, Hair, Choices, Appearance, Energy, Stamina, Trust.<sup>13</sup>

**Figure 1.1. Grief Isn't Just for Death<sup>14</sup>**



Most commonly “grief is caused by loss of relationships. Consequently, understanding the meaning of grief must be based on an understanding of relationships”<sup>15</sup> and “how they give a selective advantage.”<sup>16</sup> How a person grieves “will depend on their

13. McBride, “What Do We Do with All This Grief?”

14. Tumblr, “Memesfordays,” accessed March 8, 2019, <https://zippystuff.tumblr.com/post/658547082306699265>.

15. R. S. Weiss, “Grief, Bonds, and Relationships.” In *Handbook of Bereavement Research: Consequences, Coping, and Care*. Edited by M. Stroebe, R. O. Hansson, W. Strobe, & H. Schut. Washington, DC: American Psychological Association, 2001.47–62.

16. A. P. Fiske, *Structures of Social Life* (New York: Free Press, 1991).

relationship with the one who passed away and on their own ways of handling such a situation.”<sup>17</sup> British psychologist, John Bowlby, was the first attachment theorist; he describes this type of relationship connection as attachment theory, which is a “lasting psychological connectedness between human beings.”<sup>18</sup> Attachment theory is focused on the relationships and bonds between people, particularly long-term relationships, including those between a parent and child and between romantic partners.

Grief is not only normal, it is an essential aspect of [one’s] humanness. Imagine, for a moment, that scientists discovered a drug that safely prevents grief and all its pain. If grief were just an abnormality or some useless evolutionary accident or social construct, then, presumably, it would be sensible and humane to encourage wide use of the drug to eliminate grief. To many, such a world would seem inhuman indeed. Vast suffering would be eliminated, but at what cost? We do not know, but most people instinctively recognize that grief is intertwined with the meaning of our relationships and our lives.<sup>19</sup>

Attachment is an emotional bond with another person. Bowlby believed that the earliest bonds, formed by children with their caregivers, have a tremendous impact that continues throughout life. He viewed attachment as “a product of evolutionary processes.”<sup>20</sup> While the behavioral theories of attachment suggest that attachment is a learned process, Bowlby and others propose that children are born with an innate drive to form attachments with caregivers. Though five children lose a mother, each child will experience grief differently because of the unique relationship they each had with their

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17. Benda, “Bereavement and Grief Work,” 2.

18. John Bowlby, “Loss: Sadness and Depression,” in *Attachment and Loss*, vol. 3 (New York: Basic Books, 1980), 194.

19. Randolph M. Nesse, “An Evolutionary Framework for Understanding Grief.” From *Spousal Bereavement in Late Life: An Evolutionary Framework for Understanding Grief*. Edited by Deborah Carr, Randolph M. Nesse, and Camille B Wortman. New York: Springer, 2005. 195.

20. P. Draper and J. Belsky, “Personality Development in the Evolutionary Perspective,” *J Pers.* 58, no. 1 (1990): 141–61.

mother. The experiences (relationship) that each one of them had is different; therefore, they all experience different losses. The “selective advantages” or benefits that they received from their mother are different based on each child’s personality, needs, “the nature and meaning of the relationship . . . their own personal characteristics and life history, the specific aspects of their loved one’s death, the social situation surrounding them, and their physical state.”<sup>21</sup> Theologian Gordan Kaufman and pastoral psychologist Phillip Bennet both believe that there is a connection between attachment theory and God that helps people process through their grief in a healthier way as they deal with their loss. Bennett believes,

Without God as [one’s] secure base, [one’s] love of others easily becomes distorted by [one’s] fear of loss; [people] cling to others for fear of losing them (which may, in fact drive them away, fulfilling [their] worst fear). Or [people] may try to avoid the pain of loss by avoiding intimacy altogether. . . . The secure base of God’s love will not take away [one’s] losses but it can help [one] to discover an abiding Presence that sustains [one] in the midst of things that are passing away. In letting [oneself] be loved by God, [people] form an attachment to the only One who cannot leave [them].<sup>22</sup>

Having a relationship with God helps the bereaved to go on living life—giving and receiving love. In addition, people also grieve in association with previous losses that they have experienced in their lifetime, including loss of a job, health, home, finances, and more. Elizabeth Postle, in her blog “Grieving multiple losses—how do we cope?” shares several ways that one might experience multiple grief experiences. She says,

Multiple grief comes in many different forms. There may be multiple deaths within a short period of time either within a family, or among friends. The combination of a death in the family, a divorce or separation, loss of a job, an accident, or diagnosis of a chronic illness can also lead to bereavement overload

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21. Theresa Rando, *Twelve Insights into Grieving after the Death of Your Loved One*. Dignity Memorial. Accessed assessed September 14, 2019,, <https://www.dignitymemorial.com/support-friends-and-family/grief-library/12-insights-into-grieving-after-the-death-of-your-loved-one.2>.

22. Phillip Bennett, *Let Yourself Be Loved* (New York: Paulist Press, 1997), 31.

as these are all important and stressful losses. Loss of a baby through miscarriage or having to give up a child to adoption might be other examples of grief which can come on top of other losses. Loss of a pet or a home can be important causes of grief too. The children leaving home can lead to feelings of empty nest syndrome or loss of identity. All these create feelings of grief, and combinations of any of them can be very stressful and put much pressure on people and their families.<sup>23</sup>

Relationships form a mosaic just as the pieces of a person's grief journey form a unique mosaic. "[A] mosaic is an art form that is both ancient and contemporary. . . . Mosaics are formed by the combination and arrangement of multiple small pieces of fragments of material, called tesserae."<sup>24</sup> When one comes into relationship with another, it is a combining of who that person is in the past, present, and who they will become. Kelley, in her book *Grief: Contemporary Theory and The Practice of Ministry*, believes a mosaic is a metaphor for grief. She says, "No two mosaics can ever be exactly the same, so no two experiences of grief are the same. As each mosaic is particular, fashioned by many individual elements configured in unique ways, so each person's experience of grief is particular."<sup>25</sup> Grief is a personal journey and is unique to the relationships of the person who is experiencing loss.

George Knight writes, "Love and grief are two sides of the same precious coins. One does not—and cannot—exist without the other. They are the yin and yang of [human life] . . . . If we allow ourselves to love, we must also allow ourselves the grace of grief

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23 Elizabeth Postle, "Grieving Multiple Losses—How Do We Cope?" *Grief and Sympathy*, accessed August 23, 2021, <https://www.griefandsympathy.com/grieving-multiple-losses.html>.

24. Kelley, *Grief: Contemporary Theory and the Practice of Ministry*, 4.

25. *Ibid.*, 5–6.



and mourning.”<sup>26</sup> While grief and mourning are often used interchangeably, there is a difference in their meanings, however subtle as it may be, as Sharon Brown informs:

Early in his writing, Dr. Worden cautions practitioners against using the words “grief,” “mourning,” and “bereavement” interchangeably. Rather, he discusses and demonstrates the importance of distinguishing between these terms. He describes “grief” as the experience of loss due to death; “mourning” as the process a person goes through in adapting to the death; and “bereavement” as the definition of a loss to which a person is trying to adapt.<sup>27</sup>

Grief is comprised of the various emotions that one feels on the inside before, during, or after the loss of a loved one, but which are not necessarily noticed on the outside by others. The bereaved person is one who is experiencing deep sorrow from a loss.

Bereavement refers to “a period of mourning or state of intense grief, especially following the death of a loved one. It is often a process that includes going through several stages of grief, which also can be used more generally to mean the state of having lost something very dear.”<sup>28</sup> Grief is deep sorrow; it is the emotion that one feels following the experience of deep loss of any person, place, or thing. Suzanne Perkins offers:

The word “grief” first appeared in English in the early 1200s, when it was used to refer to hardship, suffering, and pain. It came from the Old French word of the same spelling, which referred to a wrong, an injustice, or a misfortune—and which, in turn, came from the Old French word, *grever*, meaning to afflict, burden, or oppress. *Grever* came from the Latin *gravare*, which meant to make heavy or cause grief, and which came from another Latin word, *gravis*, which

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26. Wolfelt, “Grief.”

27. Sandra R Brown, “Grief Counseling and Grief Therapy: A Handbook for the Mental Health Practitioner,” *The Journal of Pastoral Care & Counseling* 64, no. 1 (2010), accessed July 5, 2020, <http://search.ebscohost.com/login.aspx?direct=true&db=rft&AN=ATLA0001905102&site=ehost-live>.

28. “Bereavement,” Dictionary.com, accessed July 5, 2020, <https://www.dictionary.com/browse/bereavement>.

meant weighty. Grief's more modern meaning, to describe mental pain and sorrow, appeared around 1300.<sup>29</sup>

Grief is the normal human response that one experiences when one has deep despair. Grief is a natural emotion that arises when one has lost someone or something for whom he or she cares deeply, although there have been many people who believe that they have not ever or just do not grieve after a loss. For example, one young lady mentioned in a grief class that when her grandmother died, she did not go through any kind of grieving process. She thought was weird, because she had been told that if one has loved someone who died, then grief is the response one will experience. She also expressed to the class how much she loved her grandmother and how close she was to her. She went on to mention that she felt grief before but with things other than death.

While this was her experience, it is important to know that grief is expressed in different ways, at different times, and is based on different circumstances that includes the past and the present. For example, one man mentioned that his father died, and he, too, did not experience any grief, but when his pet died, he experienced sadness and cried. In reality, the grief he felt for his pet was a compilation of all the losses he had experienced in his life. When he grieved his pet, he was also grieving his father with what is called delayed grief.

Benda expressed in his article, "Bereavement and Grief Work," that

Delayed reactions are sometimes mobilized years after the occurrence and because of an event which is similar but has no apparent connection with the earlier one. Earlier emotions may be mobilized, for example, if there is another

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29. Suzanne Purkis, "The Etymology of Death, Grief, and Mourning," *Apoplectic Apostrophes Confessions of a Grammar Ghoul* (December 3, 2015), accessed July 5, 2020, <https://lucidedit.wordpress.com/2015/12/03/the-etymology-of-death-grief-and-mourning/>.

death or separation in the family. The grief reaction actually deals with the first bereavement rather than centering on the more recent loss.<sup>30</sup>

Again, people manifest grief in many ways and at different moments in their lives. Many times, when a person experiences delayed or inhibited grief, they do not realize that when they do express grief over something else, they actually could be expressing their grief for a lost loved one and the current situation in conjunction. People grieve in association with previous losses that they have experienced in their lifetime.

To understand grief, one must first understand what emotions are. Don Hockenbury and Sandra E. Hockenbury, in their book *Discovering Psychology*, define emotions as the following, “An emotion is a complex psychological state that involves three distinct components: a subjective experience, a physiological response, and a behavioral or expressive response.”<sup>31</sup> Emotions are psychophysiological reactions to outward impulses; therefore, they are real in the sense of being biological reactions, not in the sense of being metaphysical or abstract agents. According to Dictionary.com, emotions “are a natural instinctive state of mind deriving from one’s circumstances, mood, or relationships with others.”<sup>32</sup> Emotions are real and they reveal the state of a person’s mind. If honest, one “will admit that human emotions vary greatly, and that people live together in a very ambiguous and ambivalent form of relatedness.”<sup>33</sup>

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30. Benda, “Bereavement and Grief Work,” 2.

31. Don Hockenbury and Sandra E. Hockenbury, *Discovering Psychology* (New York: Worth Publishers, 2007), 117.

32. Dictionary.com. “Bereavement.” Accessed July 5, 2020. <https://www.dictionary.com/browse/bereavement>.

33. Benda, “Bereavement and Grief Work,” 2.

Emotions are “shaped by natural selection to cope with the adaptive challenges of the situation”<sup>34</sup> that one may be experiencing at the time.

In his article, “Theories of Emotions,” Gregory Johnson relates that emotions are “one type of affect, other types being mood, temperament, and sensation (for example, pain). Emotions can be understood as either states or as processes. When understood as a state (like being angry or afraid), an emotion is a type of mental state that interacts with other mental states and causes certain behaviors.”<sup>35</sup> Emotions are what make humans human. Daily, humans are guided by their emotions. Robert Brault once said, “Never let your emotions rule, but always let them testify.”<sup>36</sup> Emotions play countless roles in one’s life and they help to screen how one perceives the world around oneself. “Emotions do serve functions, such as focusing attention, communicating, and making certain behaviors more likely. . . . They adjust physiology, motivation, perception, and behavior in ways that increase the ability to cope with certain situations.”<sup>37</sup>

Emotions help to navigate the way people live and carry out each day of their lives. If one is not careful with dealing with one’s emotions, however, they have the ability to control one’s life. Because emotions are wired into the fallen nature as well as the regenerated nature, sin and Satan have access to them and will use them to try to manipulate humans/Christians to act in ways that do not represent their faith. Dale

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34. Deborah S. Carr, Randolph M. Nesse, and Camille B. Wortman, *Spousal Bereavement in Late Life* (New York: Springer Pub. Co., 2006), 205.

35. Gregory Johnson, “Theories of Emotion,” *Internet Encyclopedia of Philosophy*, accessed July 5, 2020, <https://iep.utm.edu/emotion/#H1>.

36. Robert Brault, “My 2013 Top Fifty,” The New Robert Brault Reader. Accessed November 8, 2019, <http://rbrault.blogspot.com/p/my-2013-top-fifty.html>.

37. Carr, Nesse, and Wortman, *Spousal Bereavement in Late Life*, 205.

Carnegie stated, “When dealing with people, remember [one is] not dealing with creatures of logic, but creatures of emotion.”<sup>38</sup> Emotions must be allowed to be expressed and, most importantly, balanced, just like all things in life. Most people tend to think that grief only makes one sad, but grief is not that simple. When one has loved and lost someone, it should be expected that the reality of grief will take one through a whirlwind of emotions—including but not limited to shock, loneliness, isolation, anxiety, helplessness, fatigue, guilt, numbness, disbelief, denial, sleep disturbance, loss of appetite, social withdrawal, and more. In Melissa Kelly’s words, “Grief becomes a new character in one’s life narrative, perhaps largely receding over time but never fully vacating the stage and capable of making an entrance at particular moments throughout one’s life.”<sup>39</sup> One may also be caught off guard when emotions change rapidly, intensifying and then retreating again, only to reemerge when least expected.

### **Types of Grief**

The human emotions of grief are a shared experience among all human life but how they are displayed through mourning is experienced differently. How one grieves depends on many factors, including personality, coping style, life experiences, religious beliefs, and the significance of the loss. At times, one may be unaware that he or she is grieving. Grief surfaces in a variety of ways, and it is okay if one’s grief looks different from others around them. How grief affects a person depends on what type of loss they have suffered, their culture, religious beliefs, age, relationships, and their physical and

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38. Dale Carnegie Quotes, BrainyQuote.com, BrainyMedia Inc, 2022, [https://www.brainyquote.com/quotes/dale\\_carnegie\\_130727](https://www.brainyquote.com/quotes/dale_carnegie_130727), accessed November 8, 2019.

39. Kelley, *Grief: Contemporary Theory and the Practice of Ministry*, 37.

mental health. One's grief experience can be as physical and mental as it is emotional. Grief can be expressed in physical, behavioral, social, and cognitive ways. Researchers have charted many different types of grief that one can experience. Below are several widely held types of grief and how they manifest, which J. William Worden expounds on in *Grief Counseling and Grief Therapy: A Handbook for the Mental Health Practitioner*.

Normal grief is the process of moving toward accepting the loss. "Normal grief, also referred to as uncomplicated grief, encompasses a broad range of feelings and behaviors that are common after a loss."<sup>40</sup> While experiencing normal grief (mourning) a person experiences the following "classic symptoms of sleep disturbance, appetite disturbance, and intense sadness."<sup>41</sup> When going through normal grief, people are able to function and continue with basic day-to-day activities. Though they may find that daily life is more difficult, they are still able to continue working, cleaning, and completing routine tasks.

Acute grief "is felt almost immediately upon the passing of a loved one, but it is some time before the reactions to bereavement will develop fully."<sup>42</sup> Somatic distress occurs in waves with feelings of tightness in the throat, shortness of breath, an empty feeling in the abdomen, a sense of heaviness and lack of muscular power, and intense mental pain.

Anticipatory grief is the experience of deep sorrow at the point when the impending loss sinks into the mind prior to the loved one actually dying. The feelings of

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40. J. William Worden, Worden, J. William, *Grief Counseling and Grief Therapy: A Handbook for the Mental Health Practitioner*, 4th ed. New York: Springer, 2018. 17.

41. Ibid., 31.

42. Benda, "Bereavement and Grief Work," 2.

loss and pain stem from imagining what life will be like without a loved one. The emotions one feels during anticipatory grief can be just as intense as the normal grief one feels after a death. Anticipatory grief is a normal process, even if it is not discussed as often as regular grief.

Exaggerated grief happens for those who are “aware that the symptoms and behaviors they are experiencing are related to the loss, and they seek therapy because their experience is excessive and disabling.”<sup>43</sup> Exaggerated grief is experienced through the intensity of normal grief responses and has the potential to grow worse over time. If not dealt with, it could result in complicated grief.

Complicated grief is being completely overwhelmed with grief. Those experiencing this type of grief are constantly thinking about the death, worrying about what “could have” happened, and obsessively avoiding any reminder of the death. “For many years, most of those working with complicated mourning and grief therapy have used terms like ‘chronic grief,’ ‘delayed grief,’ and ‘exaggerated grief’ to delineate the diagnosis of those with complicated bereavement or complicated mourning.”<sup>44</sup> Complicated grief symptoms often interfere with normal daily functioning and the person’s ability to find meaning and purpose in life. The person struggling with complicated grief can experience self-destructive behavior, suicidal thoughts, drug abuse, abnormal fears, nightmares, and even the emergence of underlying psychiatric disorders.

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43. Worden, *Grief Counseling and Grief Therapy*, 142.

44. *Ibid.*, 1.

This type of grief is best diagnosed by clinicians. Those afflicted with complicated grief typically need counseling to return to normal and avoid developing a mental illness.

Chronic grief is an intense reaction of grief that does not go away over time. Usually, those who experience chronic grief are conscious of it. This is because their grief has probably been going on for many years after the death of a loved one. They may say things like “I’m not getting back to living,” “This thing is not ending for me,” or “I need help to be myself again.”<sup>45</sup> Just being aware that they have chronic grief, however, does nothing to help relieve themselves on their own.

Delayed grief, sometimes called inhibited grief, is the experience of grief long after the loss of a loved one or when grief is not discussed until it eventually manifests in the body. “The person may have had an emotional reaction at the time of the loss, but it is not sufficient to the loss. At a future date, the person may experience the symptoms of grief over some subsequent and immediate loss, and the intensity of his or her grieving . . . is carried forward and is being experienced at the time of the current loss.”<sup>46</sup>

During masked grief, persons “experience symptoms or behaviors that cause difficulty, but they do not recognize the fact that these symptoms or behaviors are related the loss.”<sup>47</sup> Masked grief can be in the form of physical symptoms or other negative behaviors that are out of character.

Disenfranchised grief, also known as hidden grief or sorrow, “refers to losses in the mourner’s life of relationships that are not socially sanctioned.”<sup>48</sup> This grief goes

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45. Worden, *Grief Counseling and Grief Therapy*, 138.

46. Ibid., 140.

47. Ibid., 144.

48. Worden, *Grief Counseling and Grief Therapy*, 2.



unacknowledged or unvalidated by social norms. Aaron Lazare, in *Unresolved Grief*, discusses the following:

Two kinds of loss . . . are directly related to this concept of disenfranchised grief. Socially negated losses are those losses that society treats as non-losses. Examples of this would be pregnancy losses, either spontaneous or induced. The second kind of loss related to disenfranchised grief would be socially unspeakable losses. These are specific losses about which the mourner has a difficult time talking about.”<sup>49</sup>

These diverse responses to grief can be of help to inform mourners that it is okay if one’s grief looks different than others. Because human beings have a plethora of emotions that are difficult to understand at times, grief can and will show up for different reasons and times, and this is completely normal.

### **Stages of Grief**

Grieving is a completely natural process that humans experience as a result of a loss, and it can be profoundly painful and distressing. Bruce Petersen writes, “Elizabeth Kubler-Ross’s monumental 1969 book on *Death and Dying* was one of the most significant studies of the twentieth century on how people cope with dying. Her studies led her to identify five stages in the dying process:”<sup>50</sup> denial, anger, bargaining, depression, and acceptance.

Although some people do not experience the stages in the order listed, this is not an issue. The key to understanding the stages is not to feel like one must go through every one of them or in the precise order listed above. Instead, it is more helpful to look at them

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49. Aaron Lazare, “Unresolved Grief,” in A. Lazare, ed., *Outpatient Psychiatry: Diagnosis and Treatment* (Baltimore: Williams & Wilkins, 1979), 498–512.

50. Bruce L. Petersen, *Foundations of Pastoral Care* (Kansas City, MO: Beacon Hill Press of Kansas City, 2007), 232.

as guides in the grieving process that help mourners understand and put into context where they are in their grief journeys. Above all, grief should not be suppressed. “The stages have evolved since their introduction and have been very misunderstood over the past four decades. They were never meant to help tuck messy emotions into neat packages. They are responses to loss that many people have, but there is not a typical response to loss as there is no typical loss.”<sup>51</sup> Below are listed the five stages of grief as presented by Kubler-Ross.

The first stage is denial, which helps protect the individual from experiencing the intensity of the loss and should not be confused with not caring. “Denial is often one of the first emotions experienced in the grieving process. It’s very natural to question and reject the reality of our loss.”<sup>52</sup> Denial is when one cries out that this cannot be happening. It is when individuals refuse to accept the fact that a loss has occurred; they might minimize or outright deny the situation. It is suggested that loved ones and professionals be forward and honest about loss so as not to prolong the denial stage. Denial helps one survive the loss. In this stage, the world becomes meaningless and overwhelming.

The second stage is anger, which “is frequently experienced after a loss. It can be one of the most confusing feelings for the survivor and, as such, is at the root of many problems in the grieving process.”<sup>53</sup> For some, being angry is more acceptable than being

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51. “The Five Stages of Grief,” Grief.com, accessed October 12, 2019, <https://grief.com/the-five-stages-of-grief/>.

52. Cathy Gardner Maddams and James W. Reapsome, *Grief: God's Help in Times of Sorrow*, Lifeguide Bible Studies (Downers Grove: Inter Varsity Press, 2012), 9.

53. Worden, *Grief Counseling and Grief Therapy*, 19.

sad. Anger is the body's natural reaction to threat. The grieving person fears being hurt; therefore, they become angry that they are being abandoned and their life is being changed.

Third, bargaining is the stage that may be marked by persistent thoughts about what could have been done to prevent the death or loss. Bargaining is when someone may "attempt to strike a deal with hospital personnel, others, or God; for example, in exchange for [the loved one's life] and continued life, [he or she] will behave in some exemplary way or will fulfill some promise."<sup>54</sup> Some people become obsessed with thinking about specific things that could have been done differently to save the person's life or prevent the loss. "In a way, this stage is false hope. You might falsely make yourself believe that you can avoid the grief through a type of negotiation."<sup>55</sup> Losing a love one can cause one to consider any way they can avoid the pain of the loss. One is willing to do almost anything to have the loved one back.

Fourth, depression overwhelms when people begin to realize and feel the true extent of the death or loss. "Sadness is the most common feeling found in the bereaved."<sup>56</sup> Depression is more than just sadness, as Worden explains. "The main distinction between grief and depression are these: while in depression as well as grief, you may find the classic symptoms of sleep disturbance, appetite disturbance, and intense sadness; however, in a grief reaction, there is not the loss of self-esteem commonly found

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54. Kelley, *Grief: Contemporary Theory and the Practice of Ministry*, 46.

55. Christina Gregory, "The Five Stages of Grief," Psycom (May 4, 2021), accessed October 12, 2019, <https://www.psycom.net/depression.central.grief.html>.

56. Worden, *Grief Counseling and Grief Therapy*, 18.

in most clinical depression.<sup>57</sup> In the depression stage, the individual may experience self-pity and feel lonely, isolated, empty, lost, and anxious.

Finally, acceptance is “to come full face with the reality that the person is dead, that the person is gone and will not return.”<sup>58</sup> As Worden puts it,

The goal of mourning is eventually to get to the place of acceptance where the person is able to think of the deceased without pain. There is always a sense of sadness when you think of someone you have loved and lost, but it is a different kind of sadness—it lacks the wrenching quality it previously had. One can think of the deceased without physical manifestations such as intense crying or feeling tightness in the chest. . . . Also mourning is finished when a person can reinvest his or her emotions into life and in the living.<sup>59</sup>

At the same time, it is important to remember that “there is also a sense in which mourning is never finished.”<sup>60</sup> When the place of acceptance is reached, it is not that there is no longer feelings of pain of loss. Sadness can still be present, but the reality of the loss is no longer resisted.

Kubler-Ross’s five stages of grief provides a framework, which can be used to help the bereaved identify where they are in their journeys through grief, and to identify what they are experiencing emotional, physically, and mentally. According to Bruce Petersen,

[Kubler-Ross’s] groundbreaking research . . . has had a great impact in three areas: people dealing with grief need to address unfinished business before they can deal with death, pastors need to be aware of the common experiences of dying people to help identify the person’s basic needs and give them the needed support,

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57. Worden, *Grief Counseling and Grief Therapy*, 31–2.

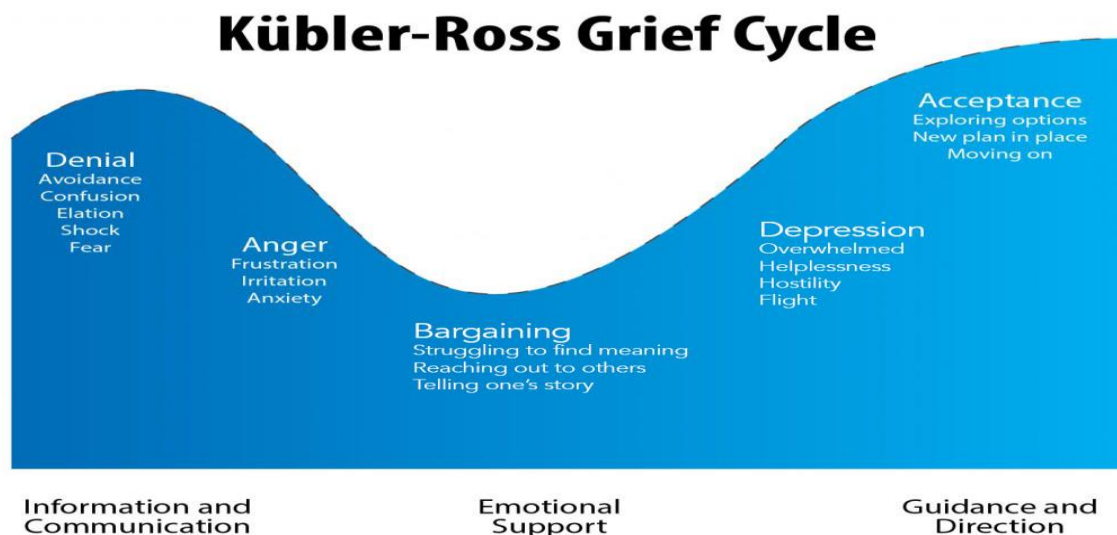
58. Ibid.

59. Ibid.

60. Ibid.

[and] pastors need to learn from grievors to understand themselves and be more effective in ministry to the church.”<sup>61</sup>

**Figure 2.1. Kübler-Ross Grief Cycle**



Petersen notes, “Since Kubler-Ross completed her study, there have been several studies that have looked at the issues of death and dying and have arrived at different conclusions. One of the problems of Kubler-Ross’s early work was that people did not all follow neatly and in order through the five stages.”<sup>62</sup> Since grief is unique and based on many factors, one’s progress through grief cannot be categorized with anyone else’s progress. “The hope is that with these stages comes the knowledge of grief’s terrain, making [one] better equipped to cope with life and loss. At times, people in grief will often report more stages. Just remember [one’s] grief is as unique as”<sup>63</sup> one is.

Kubler-Ross’s stages of grief provide the foundation to understanding that grief encompasses a number of emotions that one can experience during or after a loss. Leroy

61. Petersen, *Foundations of Pastoral Care*, 234.

62. Ibid.

63. “The Five Stages of Grief,” Grief.com, accessed October 12, 2019, <https://grief.com/the-five-stages-of-grief/>.

Joeston, in “Voices of the Dying and Bereaved: A Bridge Between Loss and Growth,” notes, “If we look more closely at the five stages of Kubler-Ross, there are really only two, and they are not stages but reactions which remain in dynamic tension, namely resistance and acceptance. Denial, anger, bargaining, and depression are merely different expressions of resistance.”<sup>64</sup> However one looks at Kubler-Ross’s five stages, the fact that grief is a normal emotional response to loss of helpful knowledge. The goal of the stages “is to understand (and try to explain) the grieving process, not to be prescriptive about what people have to go through.”<sup>65</sup> Kübler-Ross states that the stages of grief are not linear, nor will every person experience them. Some may experience one stage, while others may experience three or all five stages.

### **Theological, Biblical, and Historical Foundations**

The study of grief offers a familiar theme that can be found throughout the Bible. “When death is mentioned in the Bible, frequently it relates to the experience of the bereaved, which will normally respond immediately, outwardly, and without reserve.”<sup>66</sup> In the Old Testament, many of the psalmists expressed intense grief (Ps. 6, 35, 38, 42, 43, 88). Abraham and Isaac mourned the loss of Sarah (Gen. 23:2; 24:67). The Israelites grieved the death of Jacob (Gen. 50:10), Aaron, Moses, and Samuel (Num. 20:29; Deut.

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64. Leroy B Joeston, “The Voices of the Dying and Bereaved: A Bridge Between Loss and Growth,” in Lawrence E. Holst, *Hospital Ministry: The Role of the Chaplain Today* (Eugene: Wipf & Stock, 2007), 140.

65. Margaret Stroebe, Henk Schut, and Kathrin Boerner, “Cautioning Health-Care Professionals: Bereaved Persons Are Misguided through the Stages of Grief,” *OMEGA: Journal of Death and Dying* (February 13, 2017): 11, accessed October 12, 2019, [https://journals.sagepub.com/doi/full/10.1177/0030222817691870#\\_i10](https://journals.sagepub.com/doi/full/10.1177/0030222817691870#_i10).

66. Charles W. Draper, Chad Brand, and Archie England, eds., *Holman Illustrated Bible Dictionary*, rev. ed. (Chattanooga: Holman Reference, 2003), 690.

34:8; 1 Sam. 28:3). David and his men mourned the death of Saul and his son Jonathan (2 Sam. 1:12, 17), and Jeremiah wrote songs to mourn the death of Josiah (2 Chron. 35:25).

In the New Testament, Jesus withdrew privately to grieve the death of John the Baptist (Matt. 14:13), and he openly wept with Mary and Martha at the death of their brother, Lazarus (John 11:35). Believers mourned the death of Stephen (Acts 8:2). Women wept for the loss of Tabitha in Joppa (Acts 9:39). Yet, too often, the church discourages its community from grieving through preaching and teaching that leads to the lack of understanding of the support needed beyond the funeral.

Believers are made to feel that it is inappropriate to grieve based on 1 Thess. 4:13 (KJV), “But I would not have you to be ignorant, brethren, concerning them which are asleep, that ye sorrow not, even as others which have no hope.” Alan John and Philip Garrow, in “The Eschatological Tradition behind 1 Thessalonians,” note, “The Thessalonians had received the missionaries’ message as ‘the word of God’ (1 Thess. 2.13), and yet there was a problem. Even as they embraced the new teaching, something was causing them to grieve hopelessly over fellow believers who had died.”<sup>67</sup> Paul did not say not to grieve; instead, he wrote that Christians should grieve from a place of hope. Petersen observes,

He goes on to say that, when Jesus returns, the dead shall be raised and join those who are alive to be taken up to be with the Lord forever. He concludes with some powerful words of hope, “Therefore encourage each other with these words” (18). The resurrection is a word of hope for any believer who is facing death. No more

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67. Alan John and Philip Garrow, “The Eschatological Tradition behind 1 Thessalonians: Didache 16,” *Journal for the Study of the New Testament* 32, no. 2 (December 2009): 191–215, accessed July 19, 2019, doi:10.1177/0142064X09351055.

night, no more pain, no more sorrow, heaven will be eternal joy. The resurrection also brings to those who are left behind the hope of reunion again.<sup>68</sup>

As humans, believers are expected to grieve but to grieve in ways appropriate to their relationships with what or whom they have lost. Because of the hope they have, however, which goes beyond physical death, believers do not go about grieving in the same manner as those who believe that death is the end. John and Garrow believe,

Against this background, Paul faced a taxing dilemma. He could not simply retract the initial ‘word,’ and yet neither could he allow their hopeless suffering. A route that was open to him, however, was to offer a boldly authoritative reinterpretation of the offending tradition; something that preserved the broad authority of what they had received, while pointing its implication in a new direction.<sup>69</sup>

Paul offered this text to help believers not to be ignorant of what happens when someone dies or how that might feel. Somehow, however, believers have still found themselves ignorant of the truth of their human expectation of grieving. Grieving was and is expected to be done from a place of hope and not from a place of finality.

Then there are many who believe that God does not want believers to grieve, based on Ezek. 24:16, where God says to the prophet, “Son of man, behold, I take away from thee the desire of thine eyes with a stroke: yet neither shalt thou mourn nor weep, neither shall thy tears run down.” God told Ezekiel that his wife would be taken with “one blow,” and he was not to mourn or weep. “He was permitted to moan under his breath, but he could not follow the normal customs of mourners (v. 17).”<sup>70</sup> It is important to note, according to Lamar Eugene Cooper, “The passage does not say that God put her

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68. Petersen, *Foundations of Pastoral Care*, 233.

69. John and Garrow, “The Eschatological Tradition behind 1 Thessalonians.”

70. Robert B. Chisholm, *Handbook on the Prophets: Isaiah, Jeremiah, Lamentations, Ezekiel, Daniel, Minor Prophets* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2002), 265.



to death as an object lesson. God would not arbitrarily take the life of Ezekiel's wife to clarify His Word to an unrepentant people. But He would speak during the inevitable suffering of life to show them that He knows, He cares, and He will use the suffering as a basis for a hope of new life."<sup>71</sup> God was not using Ezekiel's wife as an object lesson for the people of Israel; rather, "The death of Ezekiel's wife would foreshadow the loss of the temple, which was also the delight of his eyes."<sup>72</sup> According to Chisholm, God was willing to destroy His temple because of Israel's disobedience and their refusal to believe that the Lord would not let Jerusalem fall. "Just as Ezekiel did not lament his wife's death in the normal way, so the exiles would be so shocked by the news of Jerusalem's fall that they would sit in stunned silence, unable to perform the usual mourning customs (22–27)."<sup>73</sup>

Mourning was an important practice in Ezekiel's time. Not to mourn meant that one was unable to exercise the customary practices of mourning that included wearing sackcloth, lying on the ground, and throwing ashes on one's head, to name a few. Ezekiel's wife was the "delight of his eyes," meaning she meant a great deal to him. To not be able to mourn the death of his wife would be a painful, heart-wrenching sacrifice on top of the pain of losing her. This task "would be the most difficult of all for Ezekiel to carry out."<sup>74</sup> God not allowing Ezekiel to grieve would make him a cruel God to his loving and faithful servant. However, God had a message to communicate through this

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71. Lamar Eugene Cooper, *Ezekiel*, The New American Commentary, vol. 17 (Nashville: Broadman & Holman, 1994), 1.

72. Chisholm, *Handbook on the Prophets*, 265.

73. Ibid.

74. Ibid.

prophet. “God was demonstrating to the people that He would not shed tears for the destruction of the city.”<sup>75</sup> God told Ezekiel, “Neither shalt thou mourn nor weep, neither shall thy tears run down,” but God also told him that he could “groan quietly.”

Groaning is a type of mourning that Ezekiel was allowed to do in the confinement of his own home. “God acknowledged that Ezekiel [would] feel real emotions. He did not tell Ezekiel to feel anything other than what he did feel.”<sup>76</sup> Ezekiel was to mourn (groan) in private. God was not telling Ezekiel that he could not mourn but to do so out of the public eye. “God instructed Ezekiel to deny himself any form of public expression of his private grief. Ezekiel was to acknowledge inwardly how he felt (groan), but he was not to express this outwardly (quietly).”<sup>77</sup> God was not asking Ezekiel to deny his grief but rather to acknowledge it in private. “God’s instruction to groan encourages Ezekiel to acknowledge how he feels, to experience inwardly the weight of a painful response to a pain-producing event.”<sup>78</sup> Robert Brault exhorts, “Never let your emotions rule, but always let them testify.” This is what God instructed Ezekiel to do. “God directed him to control the expression of his emotions according to the constraints of a larger purpose.”<sup>79</sup>

God used Ezekiel’s grief to speak to his people. “Succeeding verses in Ezekiel 24 reveal that God has a definite reason for instructing His prophet as He did. The absence

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75. Barry W. Madosky, *Ezekiel*. Modern Believer's Commentary. Paso Robles: Beta Mortgage Services, 2020, 28.

76. Larry Crabb, *The Marriage Builder: A Blueprint for Couples and Counselors*, enlarged ed. (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1982), 70.

77. Ibid., 71.

78. Ibid., 70.

79. Ibid., 71.

of customs of mourning was intended to convey powerfully to an apostate nation that an impending judgement for their sin would be so severe that, by comparison, the death of a wife justified no tears at all.”<sup>80</sup> There is no part of one’s life that God will not use for his purposes. God uses every part of believers’ lives, even the hard times—“notice Ezekiel did everything God required”<sup>81</sup> of him by walking in faith. “God employed the loss of [Ezekiel’s] treasured wife to illustrate to the captives He was removing the strongholds of their hearts. Apparently, Jerusalem and the temple became idols to them.”<sup>82</sup>

One’s response to grief with mourning reflects the love that one shared with the person that died. Not to show some type of mourning would result in the questioning of one’s love for the deceased. According to Chisholm, “By evening, Ezekiel’s wife was dead, and, the next morning, when the people saw his strange, seemingly dispassionate response, they correctly assumed this had something to do with them (v. 19). The prophet explained the significance of his actions.”<sup>83</sup> Ezekiel shows “two distinct types of mourning, the individual response, emotional and ritual, of one person to the death of another (Ezekiel for his wife), and the collective response, also emotional and ritual, of a social or national entity to a disaster with implications for the group as a whole (Israel for the destruction of the temple).”<sup>84</sup> The communal mourning “was [the] standard ancient Near Eastern response to national crisis. . . . The text’s primary concern is ultimately

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80. Crabb, *The Marriage Builder*, 71.

81. Madosky, *Modern Believer's Commentary*, 28.

82. Ibid.

83. Chisholm, *Handbook on the Prophets*, 265.

84. Diana Lipton, “Early Mourning?: Petitionary versus Posthumous Ritual in Ezekiel xxiv,” *Vetus Testamentum* 56, no. 2 (2006): 185–202, accessed November 2, 2019, <http://search.ebscohost.com/login.aspx?direct=true&db=rft&AN=ATLA0001513137&site=ehost-live>.

collective, not individual, mourning . . . in the light of Ezekiel's individual mourning for the death of his wife."<sup>85</sup>

The Bible has many instances of grief, showing how believers lived out their individual as well as communal grief, and how people journeyed with the bereaved in their grief. "Following the death of a loved one, the survivors would stop all of their normal activities and mourn and fast for a period of several days. Then they would be persuaded by other family members to return to their daily routine."<sup>86</sup> Mourning is a practice associated with the experience of the death of a loved one or another type of tragedy. When experiencing the emotions of grief, one is destined to mourn.

Like death, the word mourn also came . . . from Old English, from the word *murnan*, which meant to bemoan, to long after, or to be anxious about. *Murnan* came from a Proto-Germanic word of the same spelling, which meant to remember sorrowfully, and which likely came from the Proto-Indo-European root, *(s)mer-*, meaning to remember.<sup>87</sup>

Mourning is the action of remembering the grief of a loss. How one mourns reflects one's cultural customs. "Mourning was considered among Jews to be honourable and necessary."<sup>88</sup> Every culture has specific ways in which to express grief.

Rabbinic traditions reflected in the Talmud also demonstrate that mourning was an important obligation and one which aroused considerable debate as to the proprieties of the rituals. So important was the obligation to mourn that performing the *meth mizwah*<sup>24</sup> took precedence over the study of Torah (if there are insufficient numbers to bury the dead) and to a Temple service (Meg. 3b, 29a). So, in the matter of mourning, the Master said: "Great is the obligation to pay due respect to human beings, since it overrides a negative precept of the

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85. Lipton, "Early Mourning?"

86. George W. Knight, *The Illustrated Guide to Bible Customs and Curiosities* (Uhrichsville, OH: Barbour Publishing, 2007), 87.

87. Purkis, "The Etymology of Death, Grief, and Mourning."

88. Rick Strelan, "To Sit Is to Mourn: The Women at the Tomb (Matthew 27:61)," *Colloquium* 31, no. 1 (May 1999): 31–45, accessed October 12, 2019, <http://search.ebscohost.com/login.aspx?direct=true&db=rft&AN=ATLA0000987780&site=ehost-live>.

Torah” (Meg. 3b). Even the poorest was to have a professional female mourner and two flautists (M. Ket. 4.4); and Deut 21:22-23 already made it obligatory that those crucified be properly buried.<sup>89</sup>

Mourning is about taking “the grief you have on the inside and expressing it outside yourself. Another way of defining mourning is ‘grief gone public’ or ‘the outward expression of grief.’”<sup>90</sup> There is no one right or only way to mourn. Talking about the person who died, crying, expressing thoughts and feelings through art or music, journaling, praying, and celebrating special anniversary dates that held meaning for the person who died are just a few examples of mourning. Mourning is not just an indication of grief; it is also a form of supplication, a prayer of petition, a prayer of intercession.

One of the most popular ways of mourning is through weeping. As Lipton words it, “Tears, and sounds such as wailing and moaning, may thus represent either emotional or ritual responses.”<sup>91</sup> Mourning gives one an avenue to seek the face of God to restore a broken heart (deep sorrow), although it does not necessarily change the fact that one’s loved one has died. Weeping is a way of communicating one’s deep sorrow. God hears the thoughts, concerns, and emotions of those who are in deep sorrow (grief) when they are unable to speak a word because of what they are experiencing at the time. “One of the best examples in Jeremiah of the community’s response to its trauma is the tears cried by the keener or the wailing woman,”<sup>92</sup> according to Claassens, in her book, *Mourner, Mother, Midwife: Reimagining God's Delivering Presence in the Old Testament*.

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89. Strelan, “To Sit Is to Mourn”, 31-45.

90. Wolfelt, “Grief”, 18.

91. Lipton, “Early Mourning”, 185–202.

92. L. Juliana M. Claassens, *Mourner, Mother, Midwife*, 26.

Weeping, accompanied with loud wailing, has long been the main sign of grief, “In Jeremiah 9, the wailing women are the ones who voice the pain and whose laments serve as memory of what and who were lost.”<sup>93</sup> “Consider now! Call for the wailing (mourning) women to come; send for the most skillful of them. Let them come quickly and wail over us till our eyes overflow with tears and water streams from our eyelids” (Jer. 9:17–18). Claassens also writes, “The image of the wailing women, as it occurs in the ancient text of Jeremiah, provides contemporary readers with intriguing possibilities for dealing with our own often fragile and flawed attempts in coming to terms with those situations where tragedy has struck on a personal and/or communal level.”<sup>94</sup> The tears of the wailing women were an expression of what the people of Judah should have been feeling at that time. “Within the book’s narrative world, the grief in these poems is anticipatory, stirred up before disaster to dramatize its coming destructiveness.”<sup>95</sup> The message is one of hope, allowing readers the opportunity to turn to God and seek him through prayer, an expression of mourning through the journey of grief. Though the people were capable of grieving on their own, public mourning “declares death’s triumph, makes its reality undeniable and something to be mourned. Their keening and lamenting created an environment of sorrow and expressed the grief of the bereaved.”<sup>96</sup>

O’Connor comments on Jer. 9:17, in which, “Yahweh begins addressing the people directly, telling them they had better think about calling the mourning (wailing)

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93. L. Juliana M. Claassens, “Calling the Keeners: The Image of the Wailing Woman As Symbol of Survival in a Traumatized World,” *Journal of Feminist Studies in Religion* 26, no. 1 (2010): 63-77, accessed June 13, 2019, ATLA Religion Database with ATLASerials, EBSCOhost.

94. Ibid.

95. O’Connor, *Jeremiah: Pain and Promise*, 60.

96. Ibid.

women to come and lead their laments.”<sup>97</sup> There was an urgency in the Lord’s plea for the people to call for wailing women to come quickly. “The reason for the haste is that lamentations can already be heard in parts of the city where refugees from outlying areas are lamenting loss of land and homes.”<sup>98</sup> The people of Israel needed the act of mourning to go on so that restoration would come to them. “Even in the face of the mighty Babylonian empire, and probably with little real power to change their situation, wailing women’s tears became a way to resist the brutal devastation of the empire that has crushed everything in its way, by refusing to accept the current situation as it is . . . laments are intense and last a good while.”<sup>99</sup>

Grieving was a communal activity. Wailing was a call-and-response expression of mourning. The head wailer led the people into public grieving and mourning. The head wailer began the wail and then others responded. Those who wailed used instruments, songs, and dances along with their voices. Through mourning, one could deal with and come through the grief journey. “Mourners, who are especially skilled women, are urged to sing their laments as over the dead. . . . The most skillful of them are needed because of the huge loss”<sup>100</sup> says Hetty Lalleman, in her *Jeremiah and Lamentations Commentary*. Skilled wailing women were also known as wise women. Claassens suggests “that the art of mourning publicly was a learned skill . . . wailing women not

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97. O’Connor, *Jeremiah: Pain and Promise*, 67.

98. Ibid.

99. Jack R. Lundbom, *Jeremiah 1–20*, The Anchor Yale Bible Commentaries (Nashville: Yale University Press, 1999), 338.

100. Hetty Lalleman, *Jeremiah and Lamentations*. Tyndale Old Testament Commentaries, vol. 21. Downers Grove: InterVarsity Press, 2013, 122.

only had to be able to draw on the reservoir of laments handed down through the generations, but women skilled in the art of lamenting were also to adapt these laments to suit the particular needs of the current situation.”<sup>101</sup> These women were called upon to come and help “the community deal with the situation at hand. . . . Their laments truly represented a community response to trauma.”<sup>102</sup> The wailing women were called in because the people were unable to mourn for themselves. They did not comprehend the coming judgment of God because the false prophets were declaring to them “peace, peace” (Jer. 6:14; 8:11). Wailers played a therapeutic role in their communities by not allowing anyone to grieve alone. They displayed the sharing of one another’s deep sorrow by mourning with them. Claassens says, “The communal act of weeping releases emotional pressure that weighs heavy on subjects.”<sup>103</sup> This allowed for a sacred space within the community to be formed so that those who grieved could do so with permission, without humiliation, and together with their community.

Other ways mourning was expressed in the Bible were by the tearing of clothes (Gen. 37:34), the removal of sandals to walk barefoot (2 Sam. 15:30), the throwing of dust on the head (Josh. 7:6; 1 Sam. 4:12; 2 Sam. 1:2; 13:19; Neh. 9:1), and/or the covering of the head (Esth. 6:12; Jer. 14:4). Some would pull out their own hair (Ezra 9:3) as a sign of emotional distress. Brand offers, “They might refrain from washing and other normal activities (2 Sam. 3:31). . . . Women wore black or somber material (2 Sam. 14:2).”<sup>104</sup> Men wore sackcloth and ashes, which Knight details, “This material was

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101. Claassens, “Calling the Keeners.”

102. Ibid.

103. Ibid.

104. Brand, Draper, and England, *Holman Illustrated Bible Dictionary*, 691.



woven from goat and camel hair or some other rough fiber such as hemp. The discomfort associated with wearing clothes made of such rough cloth symbolized the anguish and turmoil of those who had lost loved ones. See also 1 Kings 21:17–27; 2 Kings 19:1; Esth. 4:1; Job 16:15; Jon. 3:5.”<sup>105</sup> Another custom during the biblical grieving process was the gift of food, but food could not be prepared in a house that was considered “unclean by the presence of the dead. . . . Food, however, was brought by friends”<sup>106</sup> (Jer. 16:7).

The community understood the importance of caring for the grieving people’s physical nourishment. Malkie Janowski observes in the article, “Is It Appropriate to Bring Food to a Family in Mourning?” that “it is an act of kindness to attend to the needs of mourners, as they are usually not up to normal daily activity and are meant to use the time of mourning as a period of reflection and grieving, without the distractions of ordinary life.”<sup>107</sup> At the same time, the community also cared for the grieving people’s spiritual relationships with God. Claassens suggests, “The wailing women’s tears, which represent the depth of the community’s emotion in the face of extreme trauma, are closely connected to the tears of God in Jer. 8:21–3; Matt. 8:21–9:1.”<sup>108</sup> Jeremiah’s grief reflects not only his own grief but also God’s grief for his people. The pain of Jeremiah is the pain of God; thus, the tears of Jeremiah are the tears of God. “Jeremiah’s sorrow is a

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105. Knight, *The Illustrated Guide to Bible Customs and Curiosities*, 28.

106. Brand, Draper, and England, *Holman Illustrated Bible Dictionary*, 691.

107. Malkie Janowski, “Is It Appropriate to Bring Food to a Family in Mourning?” Chabad.org, accessed March 8, 2019, [https://www.chabad.org/library/article\\_cdo/aid/609429/jewish/Is-it-appropriate-to-bring-food-to-a-family-in-mourning.htm](https://www.chabad.org/library/article_cdo/aid/609429/jewish/Is-it-appropriate-to-bring-food-to-a-family-in-mourning.htm).

108. Claassens, *Mourner, Mother, Midwife*, 20.

mirroring of the grief of the LORD.”<sup>109</sup> Israel’s rebellion brought God grief and it “provides the reasons for the tears of God and God’s desire to escape to the wilderness.”<sup>110</sup> The unfaithfulness of Israel brings out “divine empathy, vulnerability, and profound sorrow. Grief overtakes anger, sympathy replaces fury.”<sup>111</sup>

Tears are an expression of what people feel at the time, and “only the weeping God can feel the people’s pain; only the suffering God can help . . . a God who identifies with its pain.”<sup>112</sup> Tears give voice to that which the traumatized are unable to speak. “The image of God who weeps offers an interruption that allows new possibilities for hope to emerge.”<sup>113</sup> The Lord’s tears for his people also give voice to his promise that he will still be their deliverer in times of judgement. Claassens notes,

It is important to understand that the image of God who weeps is a product of a community that, through its tears, was seeking to come to terms with its communal and individual grief. The book of Jeremiah permeated with tears; heaven and earth mourn (Jer. 4:28), Rachel cries inconsolably for her children who are no more (Jer. 31:15-17), and, as we have seen before, the tears of the prophet merge with God’s tears (Jer. 8:21-9:1; Matt. 8:21-23). It is indeed a traumatized and bereaved people who imagined their God as weeping.<sup>114</sup>

Abraham Heschel, in his book *The Prophets*, has a remarkable study on the pathos of God in which he clearly shows that the God of the Bible experiences emotions

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109. Joel Rosenberg, “Jeremiah and Ezekiel,” in *The Literary Guide to the Bible*, Robert Alter and Frank Kermode, eds. (Cambridge: Belknap, 1987), 186.

110. Kathleen M. O’Connor, “The Tears of God and Divine Character in Jeremiah 2-9,” in *God in the Fray: A Tribute to Walter Brueggemann*, Tod Linafelt and Timothy K. Beal, eds. (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1980), 172–185.

111. Ibid.

112. Ibid.

113. Ibid.

114. Claassens, *Mourner, Mother, Midwife*, 26.

and suffers with and because of his people. “The wailing women’s tears, which represent the depth of the community’s emotion in the face of extreme trauma, are closely connected to the tears of God . . . to the extent that we can say [that] God’s tears are embodied in [the] wailing women,”<sup>115</sup> as found in Jeremiah 9. Rabbi Kalonymus Kalman Sharprio, quoted in Herbert J. Levine’s, *Sing unto God a New Song: A Contemporary Reading of the Psalms*, expounds,

The weeping, the pain that a person undergoes by himself, alone—they may have the effect of breaking him, of bringing him down, so that he is incapable of doing anything. But the weeping that the person does together with God—that strengthens him. . . . It is hard to rise, time and again, above the sufferings; but when one summons the courage—stretching the mind to engage in Torah and divine service—then he enters the inner chamber where God is to be found. There he weeps and wails with Him, as it were together.<sup>116</sup>

God’s grief for and with his people shows the depth of his love for them. Their hope of healing comes after they have grieved together with God in community. Members of the congregation actually become the “hands and feet” of God within the community to minister to those experiencing loss. As Harris notes, the congregation can become a sacred space for mourning to take place. Rather than mourning by oneself or only within the nuclear family, congregational members and participants need not fear the showing and sharing of emotion within the congregational family setting.

Congregational family members are in a particularly strong position to help accomplish what William Worden identified as the four tasks of mourning: 1) Congregations help survivors acknowledge the reality of the loss with the funeral and memorial opportunities; 2) Being present without judgment allows the bereaved to experience the pain of the loss; 3) Church services and ceremonies help mourners begin to adjust to an environment without the deceased; and 4) The work of the church helps survivors . . . withdraw emotional energy from the deceased and reinvest it in others. The beginning of this ministry is understanding

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115. Claassens, *Mourner, Mother, Midwife*, 20.

116. Rabbi Kalonymus Kalman Sharprio, quoted in Herbert J. Levine, *Sing Unto God a New Song: A Contemporary Reading of the Psalms* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1995), 219.

the experience and believing that experiencing pain does not indicate a lack of faith.<sup>117</sup>

Nevertheless, a time of mourning can be difficult to endure, tending to isolate people rather than invite them into community. Worden's chart of the Four Tasks of Mourning (below) identifies how a person's grief journey is shaped. The chart was designed from his experience working with groups of mourners. As with Kubler-Ross's chart above, the process is not necessarily a linear process.

**Figure 2.2. Worden's Four Tasks of Mourning<sup>118</sup>**



## Preaching

From the discussion of grief and mourning, the topic will now turn toward the gaining of an understanding regarding how these topics can be included in effective preaching. Jesus commissioned his disciples after his resurrection and just before his

117. Harris, "What Is a Congregation to Do? 12-27.

118. Habits for Wellbeing, "Coping with Grief and Loss: Insights into the Grieving Process," Assessed September 8, 2019. <https://www.habitsforwellbeing.com/coping-with-grief-and-loss-insights-into-the-grieving-process/>.

ascension to heaven. Matthew describes this commission as a way to make disciples (28:18-20). In Luke 24:46–7, however, Jesus is recorded as giving a slightly different direction. He said that his story would be proclaimed or preached to all nations. On the Emmaus Road, Jesus opened their minds to understand the Scriptures, saying to them, “Thus it is written, that the Christ would suffer and rise again from the dead the third day, and that repentance for forgiveness of sins would be proclaimed in His name to all the nations, beginning from Jerusalem.” Therefore, the gospel was to be taken “to all the nations” by means of proclamation or preaching.

Paul makes the same point using the same Greek verb regarding proclamation or preaching (Rom. 10:12–17), “The Lord is abounding in riches for all who call on Him; for ‘whoever will call on the name of the Lord will be saved.’ How then will they call on Him in whom they have not believed? How will they believe in Him whom they have not heard? And how will they hear without a preacher? And how can anyone preach unless they are sent?” Preaching the gospel effectively requires that preachers believe that they are sent. As the congregation then focuses upon the powerful masterpiece of the gospel—the death, burial, and resurrection of Jesus Christ—through effective preaching, God’s saving grace generates a response in the heart of the people. When this phenomenon first took place in Acts 2, the gospel was preached and the church began to grow—they increased in number as God added to the church daily.

Preaching is as vivid and as complicated as the story of Christianity itself.

“Preaching is the communication of truth. . . . It has in it two essential elements: truth and personality. Neither of these can it spare and still be preaching.”<sup>119</sup> Phillips Brooks, a

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119. “The Meaning of Preaching,” *Journey Online* (2021), accessed October 12, 2019, <https://journeyonline.org/lessons/preaching-and-teaching-the-meaning-of-preaching/?series=14044>.

well-known American preacher of the 19th century, offers what has long been considered one of the most clear and concise definitions of preaching:

Preaching has also been described as the outflow of life, the sifting of divine truth through human personality. It consists of a message delivered by a person with a religious status to a group or congregations to win the lost and to develop spiritual life in believers. Preaching is delivered in speech format—one person talks while the rest listen.<sup>120</sup>

Preaching is a major means, chosen by God and used in the early church, to communicate the good news to people. “Although preaching has changed through the centuries, it retains, to a lesser or greater degree, the original elements of proclamation, evangelization, and instruction.”<sup>121</sup> Preaching includes not only the proclamation of the gospel to those who are lost and in need of salvation but also the preaching of the Word for believers to be encouraged through life and strengthened in their faith.

Andrew Stirling in his article, “The Church in Lament,” writes, “Preaching that has included petitions for the sufferers has been meaningful, especially if the Risen Christ is seen to be active in the midst of these events.”<sup>122</sup> From the beginning, God has used preachers as his mouthpiece. It is fitting, therefore, that Jesus makes his appearance on this earth not as a priest and not as a lawyer but as a preacher, who perfectly and completely communicates God’s final will for all mankind. Jesus was not a preacher who functioned within a religious assembly. He spoke occasionally in synagogues, but he spoke mostly outdoors in the country and in small towns and did not preach sermons. Most of Jesus’s preaching was in response to the situation, needs, traditions, politics,

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120. “The Meaning of Preaching,” Journey Online.

121. Ibid.

122. Andrew Stirling, “The Church in Lament: The Spiritual Impact of Covid-19 and the Challenge of the Deus Absconditus,” *Touchstone* 39, no. 1 (February 2021): 5–11.

charges, and questions of the listeners who gathered to hear him speak. Almost everything that Jesus said came in response to and/or in conversation with someone. There was nothing off limits in Jesus's pulpit when it came to addressing issues that affected the lives of the people to whom he preached.

It may very well be every preacher's goal to model their preaching after Jesus; however, preaching falls short when it comes to addressing the issue of grief. There is no way preachers can model their preaching after Jesus without using the platform that they have to address the issues that affect those who listen to them week after week, seeking guidance for everyday life. Sometimes, the issue is grief. McBride expressed, "It is so important to remember that for every happy occasion we celebrate and lift up in our prayer during a service, there is someone in one of the pews who is having a very different experience from others due to loss that is impacting his or her lives."<sup>123</sup> Jesus was concerned about the life situations of the people that he encountered, and today's preachers should be concerned with the life situations of their congregants.

Jesus understands the pain of the bereaved, he is caring and considerate, and meets the bereaved where they are in their journeys of grief. Thus, preaching on the topic of grief is preaching with a focus on life-related experiences just as Jesus did. Stirling continues, "Preaching, as a response to the distress and dystopia of [the] time, has had to include the concept of lament as a way of ministering to the spiritual questioning of [the] age. As a homiletical genre, lament brings the word of God alive in the church in a time of distress."<sup>124</sup> The Bible is full of comfort for the bereaved, speaking to grief in multiple

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123. McBride, "What Do We Do with All This Grief?", 32–38.

124. Stirling, "The Church in Lament", 31–45.

ways and revealing that there is an advantage to being a Christian during grief. That advantage is hope, knowing that death has been defeated in Christ (1 Cor. 15:51–8).

Preaching on the topic of grief allows for exploration of the topic in depth. This focused, topical preaching helps explain what grief is, shares what the Bible says about it, and offers ideas about how to deal with it. The lives of congregants today are yearning for hope to be declared in their grief and for preachers to proclaim the good news as it relates to grief. Congregants will have a better understanding of what they and others experience and will learn how to support others in their community through the journey of grief. Preaching on the topic of grief informs the congregation that there is a way to mourn while staying confident in God. Stirling also shares, “Lament is best used as complaint addressed to God that finds some divine response by the end of the sermon. It gives voice to the sorrow that is in [listeners’] hearts and God’s and allows the word to illuminate especially those places of deepest suffering and need.”<sup>125</sup> Preaching on the topic of grief will aid congregants in receiving emotional and social support from other Christians and can put meaning and perspective on the loss of a loved one by looking to the hope of the future.

When preachers speak in ways that are clear and imaginatively provocative, while addressing public matters such as grief, which are of great concern to their congregants, the preacher stands a chance of engaging their listeners on matters from the perspective of their commitments to Jesus. If the pulpit is not reclaimed as the place to address grief, preachers will abandon their listeners to the influences of the media, leaving them unequipped to assess those influences without the help of the deep and rich resources to

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125. Stirling, “The Church in Lament”, 31-45.



be found in the preaching of Jesus. Christ-like preaching explains life to people; it produces a changed lifestyle. Life-related preaching does not just inform but transforms. It changes people because the Word is applied to where people actually live. Sermons that teach people how to live well will never lack an audience.

### **Pastoral Care**

In Carrie Doehring's book, *The Practice of Pastoral Care*, she states that pastoral care "at its simplest . . . is a way to talk about people's deepest values."<sup>126</sup> Thomas Oden defines pastoral care, in his book titled *Becoming a Minister*, as "the branch of theology that deals with the care of persons by pastors. The use of 'theology' is what makes pastoral care distinct from other forms of care."<sup>127</sup> Pastoral care is "the work of the pastor as offering moral and spiritual guidance to the church."<sup>128</sup> Not only do pastors offer help and care to people in their churches, but also to people within the church community. Elymas Newell writes in his dissertation, *Pastoral Theology: The Poimenics*, "Pastoral theology refers to all activities of the chosen servants of God. It takes seriously the concrete and the particular in any given context and seeks to provide remedial solution to difficult situations."<sup>129</sup>

Pastoral care involves walking alongside people throughout their relationships with God, which includes both times of peace and times of crisis. It is a great thing when

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126. Carrie Doehring, *The Practice of Pastoral Care: a Postmodern Approach* (Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press, 2006), 111.

127. O. Thomas Oden, *Pastoral Theology: Essentials of Ministry* (San Francisco: HarperCollins Publishers, 1983), 11.

128. Petersen, *Foundations of Pastoral Care*, 15.

pastors can enjoy good times with families that may be celebrating baptisms, baby dedications, weddings, and so on. Not only is it good for the pastor to celebrate with families, but those families also need the pastor to be present during times of crisis.

Petersen elaborates,

Helping those in crisis can be a very important phase of one's ministry. Trust and confidence develop as a pastor is involved with individuals and families through crisis experiences. While a minister may be given the title pastor upon arriving at a church, it is not until a pastor sits with people in the hospital waiting rooms or sees families through times of conflict that they begin to say with meaning, "This is my pastor."<sup>130</sup>

Not only does a congregation want a pastor who can preach and grow the church membership, but, most importantly, they want to know that their pastor is concerned about them, their family, and all that they go through in life. They have their own image of what a pastor's role should be in their life and in the church. Church congregants have become used to a restricted access of true pastoral care, and pastors have the idea that pastoral care is about nurturing the whole church into discipleship. Or they think of pastoral care as just visiting the home bound or the sick and shut in. This is a widespread thought among pastors today that must be replaced. Robert Lewis and Ron Wilkins, in their book *The Church of Irresistible Influence*, admonish,

The church must rediscover its essential role and craft as bridge builder. For the world's sake. For the church's sake. For God's sake. We can no longer simply afford to stand on one side of the Great Chasm and shout to those on the other side. We must connect. Otherwise, the greatest unbridged chasm will remain the

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129. Elymas Davidson Newell, *Pastoral Theology: The Poimenics*, Doctoral Dissertation (October 2013), 5 (Honolulu: Atlantic International University), accessed July 9, 2019, <https://www.aiu.edu/applications/DocumentLibraryManager/upload/newell%20thesis.pdf>.

130. Petersen, *Foundations of Pastoral Care*, 169.

gap between the stunning vision of Jesus Christ and the ever-receding influence of the contemporary church in the world.<sup>131</sup>

Pastoral care today needs to be reevaluated in the church. Pastoral care was adopted from a hierarchical model in which the elders taught younger people what to believe and how to behave. In an individualistic and non-directive culture, this type of pastoral care is more than likely to be seen as intrusion than care. Peterson describes the pastor as a shepherd in service, writing,

The image of pastor-shepherd serving in the twenty-first century is not an irrelevant one. People today are desperately looking for someone who will know their names and care about their hurts. The way you do that today may be somewhat different from someone pastoring a hundred years ago. Serving the present age means caring for people in meaningful, personal ways, using the same compassion and love Jesus showed during his ministry here on earth.<sup>132</sup>

One who seeks for help (careseeker) is in need of receiving love, compassion, hope, and the peace of God, as the caregiver (pastoral care provider) becomes that listening ear. A minister in a pastoral care role is in the position of being the caregiver as many are seeking care from their pastor. “While care is an important responsibility for a pastor, pastoral care can also refer to the compassionate shepherding concern any Christian can give to another person.”<sup>133</sup> Pastoral care is no longer relegated to just the work of the pastor of the church. Leaving the care of the congregation strictly to the pastor recklessly limits the amount of people who can be cared for. Petersen goes on to say,

Lay-led pastoral care has become an essential part of ministry in many large churches today. There are more people in a church of thousands than a pastor and staff can possibly serve effectively. Lay care, either through small groups or specific ministries, overcomes, the limiting factor [of not] having enough paid

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131. Robert Lewis and Ron Wilkins, *The Church of Irresistible Influence* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2001), 28.

132. Petersen, *Foundations of Pastoral Care*, 20.

133. *Ibid.*, 18.

staff to meet the needs of everyone in the church. One of the benefits of care by the laity is the sense of fulfillment when members utilize their God-given gifts and abilities.<sup>134</sup>

God's plan for caring for his people has always involved the leaders of his church. Newell shares that scripture "provides the basis for understanding the pastoral office and its functions because it is the primary resource for Christians as their working tool. It is where God reveals the God-self to mankind in the world. Pastoral knowledge has lived out of Scripture as an authoritative canon that has shaped the practice of pastoral ministry."<sup>135</sup> In the Old Testament, the Priests and Levites gave pastoral care from the Temple. In the New Testament, God gives clear instructions that the people are to be cared for by the shepherds or overseers in the church according to 1 Pet. 5:1-4 and John 21:15-18.

Pastors and lay-leaders should desire to provide proper pastoral care for those the Lord brings to be part of their church communities. "The apostle Paul wrote the books of 1 and 2 Timothy and Titus specifically to instruct pastors and overseers how to care for people in the church."<sup>136</sup> As centuries passed, however, the church strayed from the original purpose of pastoral care for the church, which means that pastors and churches have inherited a pattern that does not fulfill God's true purpose for pastoral care.

In every church, there should be established ministries and trained leaders to provide pastoral care to the members of the church and community. "The primary modes of pastoral care in the New Testament consist of mutual edification, encouragement, and

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134. Petersen, *Foundations of Pastoral Care*, 17.

135. Newell, *Pastoral Theology*, 8.

136. Petersen, *Foundations of Pastoral Care*, 15.

a mutual discipline.”<sup>137</sup> A pastoral care provider is equipped with the definition of pastoral care and adequately obtains the ingredients of what the position requires. A pastoral care provider (caregiver) is equipped with empathy, acceptance, presence, integrity, and listening skills. All of these traits were qualities that Jesus Christ possessed when he spent time with those who were in need.

During Jesus’s ministry, he continued to accept people for who they were. He showed great compassion toward people, and gave them hope and encouragement. This is the model of pastoral care that pastors, lay ministers, and others providing care should possess. God desires for his people to be whole. He wants his people to possess economic, social, political, physical, psychological, and spiritual wholeness. Paul W. Pruyser describes some details of this practice in *The Minister as Diagnostician*,

In turning to a pastor, they [careseekers] give a signal—they want his perspective, and they want it first. They want it most urgently, or they would not have bothered to come. They present themselves perhaps bunglingly, for they are under some kind of stress. But they may want to confess, to open up, to lay bare a secret, to share an anguish, to be consoled, to be rescued from despair, to be taken to task, to be held responsible, to be corrected for attitudes they suspect are wrong, or to be restrained in their intentions. They may want to be blessed, encouraged, admonished, or even rebuked. The mind of man is complex, and the heart infinitely more so. One can count on it that some self-evaluation has already been attempted before the person turns to his pastor, just as he is likely to have taken aspirin before going to his doctor. The motives and moves of help-seeking persons should never be sold short.<sup>138</sup>

Just as God desires for his people (careseekers) to be whole in their lives, the careseeker wants the same. Therefore, they reach out to their spiritual leaders (caregivers) whom they trust and respect their spiritual guidance and authority. Caregivers are the

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137. Petersen, *Foundations of Pastoral Care*, 15.

138. Paul W. Pruyser, *The Minister as Diagnostician: Personal Problems in Pastoral Perspective* (Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1976), 46.

ones who are in physical reach and can give what careseekers desire as they seek for the peace of God during times of mourning. Pruyser shares what he believes are the dominant themes in the life of careseekers, writing,

Mourning losses and celebrating gains are dominant themes in the stories of careseekers going through life-cycle transitions like leaving home, becoming married, having children, retiring, experiencing health crisis, aging, facing death. Loss is also a central issue in many crises that bring people into conversation with pastors: the ending of relationships, divorce, managing stepfamily dynamics, unemployment, and living with disabilities, to name a few. Pastors with the skills to assess how careseekers experience loss can be effective in a variety of pastoral care encounters.<sup>139</sup>

Among all encounters with careseekers, caregivers must be caring, showing compassion, empathy, and the love of God in the process. “Members of the pastoral ministry are required to recognize grief in the lives of numerous [congregants] who seek assistance during the time of a significant loss. The effective minister is often called upon to help individuals move through the grief process in a manner that allows for personal growth.”<sup>140</sup> It is the caregiver’s responsibility to be attentive to the careseeker and be aware of the stages of grief mentioned earlier. It is important that caregivers are sensitive to all the stages of grief and care for the careseeker within that specific stage of grief that the careseeker is experiencing. “Many griever’s struggle to understand, let alone articulate, what they’re thinking and feeling as they attempt to process their grief.”<sup>141</sup> At times, caregivers could provide the care that the caregiver believes is needed; however, the careseeker may need a different type of care and attention—therefore, caregivers

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139. Doehring, *The Practice of Pastoral Care*, 65.

140. Timothy L. Ingram, E. C. Hurley, and Mary Tom Riley, “Grief-Resolution Therapy in a Pastoral Context,” *The Journal of Pastoral Care* 39, no. 1 (March 1985): 69–72, accessed July 9, 2019, <http://search.ebscohost.com/login.aspx?direct=true&db=rft&AN=ATLA0000943804&site=ehost-live>.

141. Susan Lutz and Kathy Leonard, *8 Things Grieving People Wish their Pastors Knew* (Wake Forest: GriefShare n.d.), 5.

must take the time to observe the needs of the careseeker and serve them in that adequate capacity. In their article, “Grief-Resolution Therapy in a Pastoral Context,” Timothy L.

Ingram and co-authors nuance this evaluation:

As a helping professional, the minister is often required to recognize an individual’s ability to cope with grief. Unresolved grief tends to surface as a recurring theme throughout any minister-parishioner dialogue. Pastoral response to grief cannot focus on the manifest behavior of the bereaved. Rather, using crisis intervention theory, the minister is faced with evaluating the individual’s personal and interpersonal resources. The forms of grief are idiosyncratic with each person and depend upon the person’s education, personality, rituals, culture, and social support network.<sup>142</sup>

Caregivers must serve each careseeker where they presently are and not where the caregiver feels or thinks the careseeker should be. “Caring for grieving people in your church can be challenging. People have different expectations as to the level and duration of care they should receive from a pastor. And if their expectations aren’t met, they can become disgruntled or hurt.”<sup>143</sup> Caregivers are most appreciated when they learn, honor, and serve the careseeker for whom they provide care in the way the careseeker needs it to be for a healthy, grief journey. A careseeker’s intense pain and difficult emotions can make the caregiver feel uncomfortable about offering support. There could be many raw emotions and feelings that may present themselves in the process of the careseeker’s grief. One difficult task that caregivers and careseekers may encounter is learning how to communicate with one another. “Working on communication skills can be an intense spiritual experience for a caregiver who finds it hard to be with people in a way that expresses her or his deliberative beliefs.”<sup>144</sup> Communication is the key to any relationship

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142. Ingram et al., “Grief-Resolution Therapy in a Pastoral Context”, 69–72.

143. Lutz and Leonard, *8 Things Grieving People Wish their Pastors Knew*, 5.

144. Doehring, *The Practice of Pastoral Care*, 36.

and can become the foundation or the stressor in providing care to the careseeker. A caregiver's "relational and theological competence evolves over time 'as [they] participate in increasingly complex, embodied, and varied relational networks.' It has two elements: (1) how a caregiver understands his or her theology, and (2) how this theology is reflected in the caregiver's communication skills."<sup>145</sup> How a caregiver communicates with a careseeker who is grieving is important because it not only could cause more pain to the careseeker but it will also reflect the character of the caregiver's community.

THE BEST THINGS TO SAY TO SOMEONE IN GRIEF	THE WORST THINGS TO SAY TO SOMEONE IN GRIEF
<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. I am so sorry for your loss.</li> <li>2. I wish I had the right words; just know I care.</li> <li>3. I don't know how you feel, but I am here to help in any way I can.</li> <li>4. You and your loved one will be in my thoughts and prayers.</li> <li>5. My favorite memory of your loved one is . . . .</li> <li>6. I am always just a phone call away.</li> <li>7. Give a hug instead of saying something.</li> <li>8. We all need help at times like this; I am here for you.</li> <li>9. I am usually up early or late if you need anything.</li> <li>10. Saying nothing; just be with the person.</li> </ol>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. At least she lived a long life; many people die young.</li> <li>2. He is in a better place.</li> <li>3. She brought this on herself.</li> <li>4. There is a reason for everything.</li> <li>5. Aren't you over him yet? He has been dead for a while now.</li> <li>6. You can still have another child.</li> <li>7. She was such a good person; God wanted her to be with him.</li> <li>8. I know how you feel.</li> <li>9. She did what she came here to do, and it was her time to go.</li> <li>10. Be strong.</li> </ol>

**Figure 2.3. The Ten Best and Ten Worst Things to Say to Someone in Grief**

Times of grief are both sensitive and moments of welcomed opportunities to build trust and intimate relationships with careseekers within one's community. "In those

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145. Doehring, *The Practice of Pastoral Care*, 36.



moments [caregivers] are invited into some very intimate places where people are raw, open, and undefended. It is an enormous responsibility and an enormous privilege.”<sup>146</sup> If these moments are taken lightly and delved in recklessly, then it could destroy the opportunity to build a relationship with the careseekers. Doebling further notes,

Caregivers who have done the psychological and spiritual work of transforming their earlier restrictive images of God and self, and become comfortable with different ways to use their bodies and voices, can work creatively with the increasingly complex and varied relationships they form with careseekers. They will be able to fine-tune the way they communicate, especially with people from different cultures.<sup>147</sup>

In addition, careseekers’ perceptions of God may lead them to question their relationships with God. Therefore, it is important for caregivers to know what is appropriate to say and what is not, how to say it, and when to say it. “One of the more positive spiritual insights from [grief] has been the realization that words of comfort have meaning and power. At times when Jesus spoke, people were healed, and miracles were performed (Matt 8:5-13). The power of the spoken word, when emanating from a caring heart, can have the power to heal.”<sup>148</sup> When not knowing what to say, one of the best traits to possess as a caregiver is having the ability to just listen.

Caregivers are to listen to the careseeker during their time together. Just being present is more than enough. Many times, when a careseeker talks to the caregiver, they are not necessarily looking for a response or for a solution to their grief. They just need to get their emotions out by talking. They want to share how they are feeling on the inside with someone they trust, who is listening, and who cares about what is happening with

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146. McBride, “What Do We Do with All This Grief?”

147. Doebling, *The Practice of Pastoral Care*, 35.

148. Stirling, “The Church in Lament”, 31-45.

them. Talking out loud to someone may help the careseeker to make sense of what is going on inside. As they speak, they can release anxiety and feelings of being overwhelmed.

When the caregiver takes time to put himself or herself in the position of the careseeker, to understand life from the careseeker's point of view—while maintaining the caregiver's separation of who he/she is—it allows the caregiver to be able to offer “empathy” to the careseeker in his or her time of need. Caregivers who have not experienced hardship could have a hard time providing care. God ignites the passion of those who have been sick, lost a home, lost a loved one, and so on, allowing them to become caregivers to those who in need.

In a time of listening to the careseeker, Doering shares, “People in crisis tell stories in order to make sense of what has happened to them. They cope with the chaos of intense experiences by organizing them into a narrative sequence. Pastors can listen to the unique details of a careseeker's story with the same appreciation for mystery and beauty that they bring to literature and film.”<sup>149</sup> At this juncture, it is particularly important that the caregiver is able to decipher between an actual event compared to a story being told by the careseeker. Figure 2.4 below lists several things careseekers wish their pastors knew as they share their stories. Doering continues,

Listening for narrative themes comes more naturally to many pastors than using the diagnostic categories of mental health professionals or the therapeutic frames and strategies of a psychotherapist. Working with stories is a dramatically different way of providing care than applying ideas or concepts, like diagnostic categories or models of personality. Many pastoral caregivers will be able to

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149. Doebling, *The Practice of Pastoral Care*, 67.

convey a greater sense of presence during a pastoral care conversation when they stay in a narrative mode rather than a conceptual one.<sup>150</sup>

In the process of listening to the careseeker, caregivers must define what boundaries they have set in place for themselves and for the ones seeking care. The caregiver must establish boundaries for the professionalism and the safety of both the caregiver and the careseeker. “Boundaries serve an important function in pastoral relationships, precisely because there is often a power imbalance in such relationships with one person offering care (and often holding a particular institutional status) and the other, to at least some degree, needing this support,”<sup>151</sup> according to Gordon Lynch in his book *Pastoral Care and Counseling*.

**Figure 2.4. Eight Things that Grieving People  
Wish their Pastor’s Knew<sup>152</sup>**

1. “I feel like I’m going crazy.”
2. “It’s so hard to come to church.”
3. “No one understands what I’m going through.”
4. “I thought being a Christian would protect me from the pain.”
5. “I want to grieve like a ‘good Christian.’”
6. “My relationships have gotten weird.”
7. “The second year is worse than the first.”
8. “Guilt is eating me up.”

Boundaries are defined as “guidelines, rules, or limits that a person creates to identify for themselves what are reasonable, safe, and permissible ways for other people to behave around them and how they will respond when someone steps outside those

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150. Doehring, *The Practice of Pastoral Care*, 65.

151. Gordon Lynch, “The Boundaries of the Pastoral Relationship,” in *Pastoral Care and Counseling*, Ethics in Practice Series (London: SAGE Publications, 2002), 59-73, accessed September 21, 2019, <http://dx.doi.org.dtl.idm.oclc.org/10.4135/9781446220788.n6>.

152. Lutz and Leonard, *8 Things Grieving People Wish their Pastors Knew*, 6-42.

limits. Boundaries are not rules for someone else to follow.”<sup>153</sup> Boundaries are put in place by oneself for self to follow. Lynch continues,

The notion of appropriate boundaries in pastoral relationships is a complex task. Partly this is because pastoral work takes place in such a wide variety of settings and involves a wide range of relationships, and partly because many pastoral relationships take place in congregational contexts in which the boundaries of the pastoral worker’s relationships with others are easily blurred.<sup>154</sup>

Caregivers are to be professional with the careseeker, seeking to establish boundaries of availability, privacy of space, appropriate conduct, and confidentiality, all while being consciously aware of their limited expertise and continuing to practice being detached from the careseeker. Lynch words it this way,

The boundaries that the pastoral [caregiver] brings to these informal conversations are therefore generally left implicit. Although the person they meet with may well assume that the pastoral [caregiver] will not act in ways that are harmful to them, the specific boundaries that the pastoral [caregiver] places on their work are not usually transparent. Similarly, the informal setting of much pastoral practice means that consistency may also be difficult to achieve. The pastoral [caregiver] is unlikely to see those that they work with for set periods of time, nor might they even see them in the same place or even for the same reason or in the same role. An important part of pastoral work, whether in congregational or chaplaincy settings, does seem to be the capacity of the pastoral worker to respond in a flexible way to the situations that they encounter.<sup>155</sup>

As caregivers attempt to connect to careseekers, caution must be used so that the caregivers do not become infused with the careseekers. The care is not about the caregiver, but it is about the careseeker. Each caregiver deals with personal obstacles, such as anxiety, that will have to be managed when caring for someone else and managing the need to save everyone from their current position. Differentiation is a way

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153. Out of the Fog. “Boundaries” (2019). What to Do: Ideas that have Worked. Accessed Sept. 21, 2019, <https://outofthefog.website/what-to-do-2/2015/12/3/boundaries>.

154. Lynch, “The Boundaries of the Pastoral Relationship”, 59-73.

155. Ibid.

for a caregiver to offer care without becoming fused with the careseeker.

“Differentiation is how someone or something is set apart from others.”<sup>156</sup> Ronald Richardson, in his book *Creating a Healthier Church*, defines differentiation as “the ability to be in charge of self, even when others in the emotional field are actually trying to make you be different from how you are.”<sup>157</sup> Caregivers must be able to differentiate themselves from the careseeker who is seeking help during an emotional time in his or her life. Differentiation of self is the solution to unresolved emotional attachment. It helps one to get out of reactive patterns that are brought on by anxiety. The more differentiated a person is from the emotional system in which she or he is involved, the less need there is to react to anxiety by attempting to control other people. Anxiety is systemic, but any one person in the system can change it by changing her or his own behavior.

Within healthy boundaries, caregivers must also be aware of the psychological views of the careseeker. In the psychological assessment of the careseeker, it is in the best interest of both the caregiver and careseeker to be aware of any violence, abuse, and dangerous coping practices that may harm the caregiver and/or anyone close to them. “Pastoral caregivers must always be alert to the need for further assessment when they suspect that a careseeker is experiencing violence or neglect.”<sup>158</sup>

Careseekers may start abusing legal and illegal substances to attempt to dull the emotions. Substance abuse can potentially put those near the careseeker (e.g., family members, healthcare provider, caregiver and more) in harm’s way. This may happen

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156. Vocabulary.com, “Differentiation,” accessed October 12, 2019, <https://www.vocabulary.com/dictionary/differentiation>.

157. Ronald W. Richardson, *Creating a Healthier Church: Family Systems Theory, Leadership, and Congregational Life* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1996), 1.

158. Doehring, *The Practice of Pastoral Care*, 51.

when there is a loss of a loved one, or when the careseeker has experienced violence and/or posttraumatic stress disorder (PTSD). Therefore, “pastoral caregivers must be alert to the possibility of [destructive behaviors] and ask questions in order to determine if [destructive behavior] is part of the crisis.”<sup>159</sup> If destructive behavior is found to be part of the crisis, the caregiver must assure safety. Doering expresses that when “safety is assured, pastoral caregivers can help [careseekers] establish a sense of psychological safety by assessing the extent to which [careseekers] are reexperiencing memories in nightmares, anxiety attacks, or flashbacks, and how they cope with these experiences.”<sup>160</sup> Once the caregiver assesses the careseeker’s psychological, environmental, supportive (i.e., family support), and spiritual state, it is time to formulate a care plan to guide the careseeker to recovery. As the caregiver produces a plan, he or she must be aware of the careseeker’s family, culture, and community, as these are factors in which the careseeker will be submerged during recovery.

The caregiver will not create a plan of care to transform the careseeker but will create a plan of care that will be most conducive for the careseeker. Each careseeker will have different ways of recovery. For the careseeker to follow the plan of care, the caregiver must establish a relationship of care and trust with the careseeker prior to the plan of care being established, in order to be sure that the plan will be carried out as agreed upon. As caregivers continue to care for the careseeker, caregivers must learn to become patient and not rush to become the careseeker’s savior. The best practice for caregivers is to identify the careseeker’s issue, to try to understand the problem first, and

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159. Doehring, *The Practice of Pastoral Care*, 82.

160. *Ibid.*, 83.

then to offer assistance needed for the careseeker. It is also important that the caregiver recognize when it is time to refer a careseeker to an expert. According to Pruyser,

The shepherd's task is to guide his sheep, to lead them to green pastures, and to take good care of them for their owner. And in modern times, if a ram or ewe is ill, the shepherd will get a veterinarian to make a diagnosis and prescribe treatment. Moreover, if "shepherd" and "sheep" are metaphors for people, the pastor can have ill folk diagnosed by a medical doctor or a psychiatrist, who are alleged to know far more than he does about sizing up human beings when they complain of physical or mental problems. The pastor will gladly help his people in trouble, benefiting from the advice of the diagnostician, but he surely will not consider himself an expert in diagnosis.<sup>161</sup>

When a pastoral caregiver identifies that the need of a careseeker exceeds his or her training and ability, then it is time to refer the careseeker to an expert. It is not acceptable to ignore those feelings and signs of inadequacy, nor should anxiety be allowed to overcome or question proficiency but, rather, should simply reach out for expert assistance. Pastoral caregivers may be experienced in counseling and may feel self-confident in their ability to provide care for careseekers; however, pastoral care requires a sense of wisdom and balance.

Inside of pastoral care, pastors and ministry leaders are not only focused on the psychological and emotional well-being of a person, but leaders are also concerned with the spiritual maturity of the careseeker. As pastoral care reaches across the board for care, pastoral care providers must also show concern for the careseeker's spiritual needs. As one may express concern in one part of their life, it becomes possible that they have not allowed God to fully become Lord in their life. Pastoral care providers must consider where the careseeker is spiritually in order to provide pastoral care. Pastors and pastoral caregivers must be sensitive to the spiritual needs of others while having the willingness

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161. Pruyser, *The Minister as Diagnostician*, 9.

to confront areas of change while being guided by the Lord when practicing soul care. Pastoral care leaders must have an ongoing relationship with God. It is through their encounters with God that they are able to encourage others through their journey of grief. There must be a daily communion with God to know how to care for God's people.

Pastors and leaders must be truthful to themselves about their faults. If a leader's credibility is questioned, the leader will lose the trust of the congregation. If a leader is caught or accused of any wrongdoing, it is best for that leader to be honest the first time around and not lie about it. Leaders are in a powerful position and must realize that their actions will affect other people. Leaders must continue to humble themselves and ask for forgiveness and apologize for their actions that have affected other people. Pastors also must be aware of their limits. They sometimes fail to realize that everyone needs pastoral care at one time or another, even themselves. Loving and caring Christians should all keep their antennae out to sense the need for pastoral care in others. Providing pastoral care has its challenges, but it can be both overwhelming and rewarding at the same time. It is more than just showing up at different occasions, but it is to invest in those persons for whom one is leading and caring.

### **Sacred Spaces**

In the New Testament, Jesus can be found mourning (Matt. 14:10–13, 26:38–9; John 11:35; Mark 3:5; Luke 22:42–4). He mourned the life of his cousin, John the Baptist, when he found out that Herod beheaded him (Matthew 14). Jesus's grief is the price he had to pay because he loved John. The depth of one's love is related to one's grief. As Jesus began to grieve at receiving of the news of John's death, he withdrew



“privately to a city called Bethsaida,”<sup>162</sup> far from the crowd of people and ministry to a private place to have some time to process his emotions. “News of John’s death resulted in Jesus’s desire to pull away.”<sup>163</sup> Though he was experiencing deep sorrow, he was not given the time nor the space that he needed to mourn. He was not given the time to “acknowledge the reality of the death”<sup>164</sup> and “embrace the pain of the loss.”<sup>165</sup> The demand of the people caused him to delay his need to mourn and to attend to their needs instead. “Far from feeling impatience and frustration toward [the] needy people, Jesus had compassion on them. . . . While Jesus had hoped to be alone . . . He did not send away [the] needy crowd. He had compassion for the people and took it upon himself to meet their needs.”<sup>166</sup>

The crowd took no thought of how Jesus might have felt losing someone whom he loved dearly. “Popularity and recognition have their own pitfalls. Jesus . . . needed rest and quiet, but the crowds would not let [him] get away.”<sup>167</sup> They were only concerned about what he could and would do for them. This same type of lack of caring for people’s well-being still exists today in the local Christian community. “As soon as the crowd had been fed and the disciples had picked up the scraps, Jesus immediately got his disciples and the crowd moving.”<sup>168</sup> It was not until after Jesus fed the people spiritually and

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162. Bruce B. Barton, *Life Application Bible Commentary*. Wheaton: Tyndale House Publishers, 1996.288.

163. Ibid.

164. Wolfelt, “Grief”. 18.

165. Ibid.

166. Barton, *Matthew*, 288–9.

167. Ibid., 288.

168. Ibid., 291–2.

physically that he was able to get a few hours alone before his disciples were “being blown off course, fighting the sea in their boat, buffeted by the waves”<sup>169</sup> when they needed his help. “Jesus dismissed the crowd and ‘made the disciples get into the boat’ and leave” (Matt. 14:22); then he went alone up on a mountainside to pray. Jesus wanted time to communicate with his Father.

During his ministry on earth, Jesus was in constant contact with the Father—he may have gone off alone to pray often, so his desire to do so may not have surprised the disciples, who left in the boat as instructed.”<sup>170</sup> He was not afforded the opportunity to lament the loss of his cousin, John the Baptist. He was expected to go on with his life and ministry as if nothing had happened. The problem with that is, while his life and ministry work on earth needed to go on, it did not need to go on nor would it in the same manner as if he had not experienced a life-changing event. “Going into the wilderness, alone with the Father, helped Jesus focus on his task and gain strength for what he had to do.”<sup>171</sup> As both divine and human, Jesus had a human experience when he heard of the death of John, which warranted time alone with the Father.

Grief becomes a part of one’s life in all aspects. “Most people are helpless and vulnerable after such a traumatic experience. They need understanding and protection. It places a high tax on the humane and sympathetic attitude of people” in their community.<sup>172</sup> One must “learn to live with it and integrate it into [their] continued

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169. Barton, *Matthew*, 293.

170. Ibid.

171. Ibid.

172. Benda, “Bereavement and Grief Work,” 2.

living.”<sup>173</sup> The truth is that, once one experiences a loss, life takes a shift, and all of life and how one lives life is seen and done from a different perspective. “It is often days or weeks before the full impact of the loss becomes apparent, and it is only then that the full scale of emotional reactions is displayed.”<sup>174</sup> Grief is not a bad thing in the big picture, because it can offer something positive in life, allowing for a fresh perspective on life moving forward. “Healing is not returning to an old normal but rather creating a new normal.”<sup>175</sup> Moving forward with grief is creating that new normal.

Christians who experience grief sometimes hide behind their faith because they have been led to believe that mourning is a sign of weakness in their spiritual walk with God. In his article, “Grieving vs. Mourning,” Alan Wolfelt says that one’s “capacity to love requires the necessity to mourn.”<sup>176</sup> When deep sorrow is experienced, it is inevitable that one will mourn—in fact, one must mourn. The only appropriate response to grief is to mourn, expressing the emotions of one’s grief. “In light of all that transpired, the only appropriate response to the terror all around was to raise one’s voice in weeping and wailing.”<sup>177</sup>

Mourning is an important part of the grief journey; it demands one’s attention, and it will not be denied. When one has loved deeply and lost a loved one or something

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173. Wolfelt, “Grief”, 18.

174. Benda, “Bereavement and Grief Work,” 2.

175. Wolfelt, “Grief”, 18.

176. Alan Wolfelt, “Grieving vs. Mourning” (Oct. 17, 2018), accessed September 19, 2019, <https://www.taps.org/articles/24-3/grieving-vs-mourning>.

177. Claassens, “Calling the Keeners”, 63-77.

they have loved, it is guaranteed to bring about some emotions of deep sorrow. Claassens notes,

Without the prayer of lament, the other important elements of prayer—praise, thanksgiving, confession, intercession atrophy and ring hollow. How can praise be free and joyful if the realities of broken human life are not named and lamented? How can heartfelt thanks be given for healing if the wounds are denied? How can confession of sin be sincere if we turn all sorrow into guilt? How can intercession be strong if our language does not reflect knowledge of the real sufferings of those for whom we pray?<sup>178</sup>

Not allowing oneself or others to grieve, is “to believe that there is something wrong about loving. . . . Our greatest gift from God is our capacity to give and receive love. Likewise, it is a great gift that we can openly mourn a life loss.”<sup>179</sup> Very few people would agree that mourning is a gift. Grief is comprised of emotions that nobody wants to experience at any point in life. While it does not feel good, the response of mourning offers “an avenue to deal with grief that otherwise might be too overwhelming for individuals to bear alone.”<sup>180</sup> Journeying through grief is a hard task that takes time. “Everyone grieves in their own way. Pastorally, it is important to remember that there is no magic time period in which one needs to grieve. The pain of a death can be lessened by positive actions over time, but the sense of loss never completely disappears.”<sup>181</sup> Grief has its own timetable and there is no way to rush its process. In his article, “Why We Fail the Grieving,” Philip Kenyon shares,

There is in American culture an expectation that grief support will be significant for days and even weeks after a loss. Places of employment provide up to three days of funeral leave. Then we find ourselves confused that the bereaved are still struggling while we have moved on. We know from the literature that the entire

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178. Claassens, “Calling the Keeners,” 63-77.

179. Wolfelt, “Grieving vs. Mourning.”

180. Claassens, “Calling the Keeners”, 63-77.

181. Harris, “What Is a Congregation to Do?”, 12.

first year after a death is one loss after another. The first birthday, the first anniversary, the holidays, and the anniversary of the death all represent new losses when the bereaved experience them for the first time without a loved one. Continuing to be present and supportive through these difficult days is a real ministry to those adjusting to life without the deceased.<sup>182</sup>

Not only does grief take time, but it also should not be done alone. The bereaved need the help and support of their communities to process through the journey as they take on a new narrative in their life. Sometimes doing so means that the person does not know how and will need someone to show them the way.

Those who mourn are the ones who go on to healing. Therefore, if those who are bereaved are to heal, they must give themselves the permission to acknowledge their pain and allow themselves to journey through the process of grief. Not only must the bereaved grant themselves permission to mourn, but those who they are in community with them must also give them permission.

Giving someone the permission to grieve is one of the most valuable gifts one can give. It is understood that, in order to heal, permission must be granted from both oneself and the community of which one is a part, but rarely are people allowed the necessary space to journey through grief within the community. If one avoids the feelings that come with a loss, it will only prolong the process of grieving, and overlooked grief has the potential to lead to complications, such as chronic depression, anxiety, substance abuse, and various health challenges.

Not only do Christians need permission, time, and space to grieve genuinely and unapologetically, but they also need the support of their communities as they journey

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182. Philip Kenyon, "Why We Fail the Grieving."

through their grief. They need their community to walk with them, sharing in their pain.

“The great dramatist Sophocles (c 496–406 B.C.E.) spoke of the power of grief to unsettle when he wrote, ‘Grief teaches the steadiest minds to waver.’”<sup>183</sup> The weight of grief is much lighter when it can be shared with others. “Euripides (c 484-406 B.C.E.) expressed something of the need for companionship in grieving when he wrote, ‘I loathed a friend whose gratitude grows old, / a friend who takes his friend’s prosperity / but will not voyage with him in his grief’”.<sup>184</sup> Having the support of those in one’s community can help one to handle the deep sorrow felt by the loss.

How can a church comfort and support those who grieve? Beyond providing funerals, meals, and flowers, what can the church do to walk alongside those who have suffered a significant loss? In the biblical text, grief was an important experience, so much so that professional mourners were hired to grieve along with the family and friends of the deceased loved one (Eccl. 12:5; Amos 5:16; Matt. 9:23). “Scripture is a timeless source of insight and consolation about the experience of grief.”<sup>185</sup> When Christians grieve together, it allows the church to be a place where no one suffers alone or in silence, empowering the community to be a safe place where everyone’s grief is met with compassion. “The sharing of the collective memories of the deceased, and the opportunity to mourn and lament the loss of an individual in a worship service, serves to provide a medium through which the Holy Spirit can speak a word of comfort to the

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183. Kelley, *Grief: Contemporary Theory and the Practice of Ministry*, 32.

184. Ibid.

185. Ibid.

gathered community. The opportunity to have true fellowship reminds those who grieve that they are not alone and reaffirms the conviction that God is present.”<sup>186</sup>

Job suffered multiple losses in a single day, losing his livestock, his servants, and his children—seven sons and three daughters. His wealth and legacy were taken away from him. He lost everything that meant a great deal to him, but he was not embarrassed or ashamed to grieve. He stood up and “tore his robe and shaved his head” (1:20) after the news was delivered to him. At this point in Job’s life, it looked like everything was falling apart. He had experienced loss after loss before he even had time to wrap his head around what was happening. When facing the amount of deep sorrow as Job did, one could do nothing but mourn without concern of what others think. Not long after his loss, Job was stricken with boils all over his body (2:7). Now he was grieving his health in conjunction with his previous losses. Grief was calling to grief.

The grief Job was experiencing was too great to bear alone. Hearing of the great suffering of their friend Job, “Eliphaz the Temanite, Bildad the Shuhite, and Zophar the Naamathite” (2:11) all came together. “They really act as a [community] rather than individuals”<sup>187</sup> and decided to go and see about him, to sympathize with him, and comfort him. “When Job’s friends came to comfort him because of the losses he had suffered, they mourned with him for seven days and seven nights” (Job 2:13).<sup>188</sup> His friends did not speak a word since “the sight of Job’s excessive suffering left the friends silent,”<sup>189</sup> so

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186. Stirling, “The Church in Lament” , 5–11.

187. Tremper Longman, *Job*, Baker Commentary On the Old Testament Wisdom and Psalms (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2012), 91.

188. Knight, *The Illustrated Guide to Bible Customs and Curiosities*, 2.

189. Robert L. Alden, *Job* (Nashville: Broadman & Holman, 1993), 70.

they simply supported their friend in his grieving process. “They do not judge him or berate him; they simply mourn alongside him.”<sup>190</sup> Job’s friends cried for him and sympathized with him. “Just the presence of a sympathetic person can provide comfort altogether apart from any spoken words. This probably was the finest demonstration of love these three could have shown. If they had simply returned home without saying anything, their reputations would be much different.”<sup>191</sup>

Job’s friends created a safe space where his grief was no longer his own, and they shared in his sorrow. Their sitting in silence allowed them to be a spiritual presence and companion, offering active, compassionate listening, creating a sacred space for Job to share his thoughts, emotions, and concerns when he felt the need. “They sat with him entering into his grief.”<sup>192</sup> His friends made their mistake when they tried to validate Job’s grief through their lack of understanding of grief and its process. Many people who grieve “will also identify with attempts by Job’s so-called friends, to help him make sense of the calamities that have befallen him, sometimes even openly questioning the validity of his grief rather than honoring Job’s sorrow by offering support and a listening ear.”<sup>193</sup> The time they shared in silence and entering Job’s grief with him was a perfect example of creating a sacred safe place.

Larry Crabb pens in his book, *Becoming a True Spiritual Community*, that “a spiritual community, church, is full of broken people who turn their chairs toward each

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190. Longman, *Job*, 90.

191. Alden, *Job*, 70.

192. Ibid.

193. John Schwiebert, “The Book of Job,” Grief Watch, accessed December 9, 2019, <https://griefwatch.com/pages/the-book-of-job>.



other because they know they cannot make it alone. These broken people journey together with their wounds and worries and washouts visible but, are able see beyond the brokenness to something alive and good, something whole.”<sup>194</sup> He goes on to explain that in the community “the privilege of sharing with [others] is too precious to violate in any way.”<sup>195</sup>

The community must consist of people providing care with integrity and commitment to sustaining relationships over time. “When communities are functioning well, they take care of their own members.”<sup>196</sup> They become one with each other. In his book, *A Spiritual Community: The Power to Restore Hope, Commitment and Joy*, Rabbi David A. Teutsch explains, “One of the reasons that a congregation can become a community with relative ease is that everyone shares a core commitment to values and beliefs, meaning that everyone is committed to a purpose beyond simple satisfaction.”<sup>197</sup>

One way people in community can connect with each other and with God is through small groups. The time that they spend sharing together alongside one another in the community can prove to be healing and life changing. The more time they spend together building safe spaces and cultivating trusting relationships, the more likely they are to connect beyond the set time of the small group hour. They become a part of each

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194. Larry Crabb, *Becoming a True Spiritual Community: A Profound Vision of What the Church Can Be* (Nashville: Thomas Nelson, 2007), 32.

195. *Ibid.*, 30.

196. David A. Teutsch, *Spiritual Community: The Power to Restore Hope, Commitment, and Joy* (Woodstock, VT: Jewish Lights, 2005), 1.

197. *Ibid.*, 13.

other's lives and are more apt to identify when the other is experiencing grief of some sort.

From the foundation of the early church, Christians have been called to gather as a people united in faith. As the first-century Christians followed Jesus's example of teaching in a small group setting, they created faith sharing communities that helped further the mission of the church, called all believers to discipleship, and supported them through life celebrations and times of mourning.

Palmer Becker, in his book, *Called to Care: A Training Manual for Small Group Leaders*, says, "[The] Bible clearly demonstrates the significance of smaller groups in the provision or teaching of the word of God."<sup>198</sup> For instance, it talks of historical settings that entailed smaller groups. Indeed, at the dawn of Christianity, prophets used to teach the word of God in small communities and groups. This is considerably important as it highlights the appropriate size of congregations as well as the number of pastoral caregivers who can be effectively trained.

In this context, the Bible provides appropriate strategies and approaches that can be applied in training, recruiting, and supervising groups of leaders that can eventually be trusted with providing pastoral care. Besides, the Bible provides a detailed analysis of leadership qualities expected for pastoral leaders. Accordingly, pastors are expected to integrate these principles into their work. In general, the Bible and other theological books provide critical information on the small structural groupings and their relevance in changing the world. They provide guidelines that can be utilized by pastors to ensure that

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198. Palmer Becker, *Called to Care: A Training Manual for Small Group Leaders* (Scottsdale, PA: Herald Press, 1993), 107.

they leave an impact on their congregations. Creating a safe environment is key for authentic and open sharing. “Not all congregations are communities. If most congregants don’t know each other on a first name basis, they don’t have a community in the strong sense of the term.”<sup>199</sup>

However, creating a safe environment does not happen by accident. “A community can only thrive if it conducts an ongoing conversation about which needs the community can reasonably meet. Since a major purpose of communities is to meet their member’s needs, it is important to ask which needs American society often fails to fulfill.”<sup>200</sup> Pastors and ministry leaders who are leading a group of people on a spiritual journey must create a safe community for others to share and grow. Ken Shuman, in “My Map Coach,” outlines practical methods of establishing a safe community. He expresses,

Leaders need to become self-aware of what and how they are feeling, become a non-anxious presence, observe others during the journey, learn to dialogue rather than to debate, become aware that the leader does not always have the right answer, be able to differentiate oneself from others, ask questions, practice having a win/win mentality, able to listen, and staying calm in every situation.<sup>201</sup>

While practicing these skills of a safe leader, however, the leader must also be aware of what Shuman labels as “safe space killers.” He outlines ten practical possibilities that could harm a community’s safe space: “Using the Bible as a weapon, trying to fix people, being arrogant, losing control of the group or person’s behavior, not valuing diversity, judging/condemning others, exploiting people’s unresolved issues, gossip, defensive people becoming argumentative, and people who play the blame game

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199. Teutsch, *Spiritual Community*, 13.

200. *Ibid.*, 5.

201. Ken Shuman, “Introduction to Pastoral Care,” Class Lecture (Houston Graduate School of Theology, August 27, 2013).

and refuse to own their own faults.”<sup>202</sup> Within a small group or a community that is looking to have a safe space available to all, there must be a self-disclosure mindset about the group. Participants must be able to become vulnerable and trust others, they must show unconditional love by listening and understanding others, they must learn how to serve other people as they meet the needs of others, and they should practice telling the truth. Last, participants must celebrate and encourage one another for everyone to grow.

### **Conclusion**

Within spiritual communities, many believers have already faced and will face the inevitable process of grief that human beings experience as the result of a loss, whether it be the loss of a job, relationship, house, loved one, pet, or even finances. Grief does not neatly come to an end after the funeral, or even a few months or a year later. It is a journey with many pitfalls, struggles, questions, disappointments, revelations, and opportunities to learn and grow. Since grief is inevitably coming, it is important to give Christians permission, time, and space to grieve genuinely and unapologetically, and to give communities an opportunity to offer support as they journey through grief. “In a true community, everybody feels at least a little responsibility for everyone.”<sup>203</sup> Having the opportunity to walk “along with someone grieving [is] a sacred trust,”<sup>204</sup> giving out of a moment of vulnerability. Grief is horrible, painful, and miserable, but when communities are well informed about grief and grief recovery through preaching and teaching, safe

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202. Shuman, “Introduction to Pastoral Care.”

203. Teutsch, *Spiritual Community*, 13.

204. McBride, “What Do We Do with All This Grief?”, 32–38.

spaces will be created for members within the community to journey through their grief with the support of the community.

When people are gathered to grieve, God is present. We need not worry about being in control of the situation. As pastoral caregivers, we must simply continue to check in with God to see how we can best be used. Prayer must address both the passage of the deceased soul as well as provide strength and comfort to those left behind. Our presence as caretakers is to attend to the souls [of the careseekers and their families].<sup>205</sup>

As Kenyon emphasizes,

Ministering to those who grieve can be challenging, frustrating, and rewarding. You don't need an advanced degree in counseling or psychology to support those who are grieving. Sensitivity, patience, flexibility, and a follow-up plan are the basic requirements. By initiating a compassionate and timely follow-up, your ministry can help serve and bind up the broken-hearted.<sup>206</sup>

Stirling adds,

The sharing of the collective memories of the deceased, and the opportunity to mourn and lament the loss of an individual in a worship service, serves to provide a medium through which the Holy Spirit can speak a word of comfort to the gathered community. The opportunity to have true fellowship reminds those who grieve that they are not alone and reaffirms the conviction that God is present.<sup>207</sup>

Grief is the inevitable process that human beings will experience as the result of a loss at some point in life, and the journey of grief demands attention. "Having faith does not preclude [anyone] from experiencing the process of grief. It means they have a relationship with God to lean onto or lean into as [they] process loss."<sup>208</sup> This means that believers have the right and expectation to journey through grief at some point. When

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205. Anya Spielberg, "A Shocking Event with a Pastoral Challenge," *The Journal of Pastoral Care & Counseling* 69, no. 3 (September 2015): 171–2, accessed October 9, 2019, doi:10.1177/1542305015602712.

206. Kenyon, "Why We Fail the Grieving."

207. Stirling, "The Church in Lament" 5-11.

208. McBride, "What Do We Do with All This Grief?," 32–38.

Christians learn to grieve together, it allows the church to be a place where no one suffers alone or in silence, empowering the community to be a safe place where everyone's grief is met with compassion. The report now turns to the work of the project within a local congregation to discover how the research impacted the church.

## **Chapter III**

### **Action**

When thorough observation was completed, the pastor was informed that there was a lack of knowledge and understanding about the meaning of grief, the importance of grief recovery, and the support needed within the community of HPC to accomplish the goal of becoming a safe space. He was informed that several members and leaders within the community had faced the inevitable process of grief that human beings experience as the result of a loss, whether it be the loss of a job, relationship, house, loved one, pet, or even finances. As they journeyed through their grief, the observation was that they were not allowed the time, support, or space for grief recovery within the community of HPC. It was explained to him that the congregation needed permission, time, and space to grieve genuinely and unapologetically, and they also needed the support of their community as they journeyed through their grief. After a time of prayer and much consideration, the pastor agreed to take a course of action to help the church community become more effective in supporting its congregants in the area of grief.

Following a time of preparation, a four-week grief study series on the healthy process of grieving, and a four-week preaching series on grief were created. Preachers, teachers, and leaders within the church community were selected to participate in the group per the request of the pastor. This group of people was selected because of their current position in the community. The pastor decided that these leaders should be the

first to partake in this study in an effort to gauge its effectiveness; he also hoped to create a grief recovery support group with them at the helm. This group of twelve people included leaders between twenty-eight to seventy-one years of age, male and female, from various walks of life. The group was comprised of married, single, divorced, and those with and without children. Their education ranged from a high school education to a bachelor's degree. Their work status ranged from unemployed to employed. The group met bi-weekly on Thursday nights at 7:00–9:00 pm at HPC in one of the classrooms for four group sessions. The project director, who is also Associate Minister at HPC, was the group leader.

The group meetings were set up to be a sacred space where each attendee would be open to a deeper understanding of grief, the importance of grief recovery in the community, and how to support others through the grief journey. In addition, the class was created as a sacred space where the attendees would feel free to share their grief experiences, challenges, and concerns. Thursday nights were chosen because there were no other activities going on and there would be no interruptions or distractions. The space was created as a no-judgment zone. Prior to participating in the group, each participant was given a questionnaire to evaluate their current understanding of grief, their experience with grief, and how believers should respond to grief (Appendix F).

### **The Four-Week Grief Study**

The four-week grief study (Appendix D) series was created to help to nurture safe spaces that would allow the people within the community HPC the opportunity to journey through their grief with the support of the community. Before each weekly class began, there was a time of contemplative prayer. Contemplative prayer is the discipline of



silence in prayer. “The word contemplation had a specific meaning for the first sixteen centuries of the Christian era. St. Gregory the Great summed up this meaning at the end of the sixth century as the knowledge of God that is impregnated with love.”<sup>1</sup>

According to Richard Foster in his book *Streams of Living Water*, the contemplative tradition, also called the prayer-filled life, can show the way into intimacy with God; it is the human longing for the practice of the presence of God, where one places all one’s attention on God, because through it one can experience the divine rest that overcomes alienation,<sup>2</sup> which is the foundation for a lifestyle of holiness. He adds, “Jesus, who retreated often into the rugged wilderness, who lived and worked praying, who heard and did only what the Father said and did, shows forth the contemplative tradition in its fullness and utter beauty.”<sup>3</sup>

St. John of the Cross once said, “God’s first language is silence, and in order to understand [His] language, we must learn to be silent and to rest in God.”<sup>4</sup> Through such silence, the group invited God to encounter them during the class. The silence drowned out the cares of the day and allowed each person to center self and prepare for the teaching.

The silence was not timed. The group remained silent until each person felt a release, which usually took about ten to fifteen minutes. They were a group who were

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1. Contemplative Outreach, “The Christian Contemplative Tradition” (last modified 2020), accessed October 18, 2019, <https://www.contemplativeoutreach.org/the-christian-contemplative-tradition/>.

2. Richard J. Foster, *Streams of Living Water: Celebrating the Great Traditions of Christian Faith* (Grand Rapids: HarperOne, 1998), 58.

3. Ibid.

4. FR. Bauer, “God's First Language Is Silence,” The Basilica of Saint Mary, June 26, 2019, [https://www.mary.org/blog/201906/gods-first-language-silence#.Yh\\_qL-jMK5c](https://www.mary.org/blog/201906/gods-first-language-silence#.Yh_qL-jMK5c).

regularly found in corporate prayer and intercession; however, they were not familiar with contemplative praying. They were used to praying out loud and in conjunction with others praying at the same time, but as contemplative prayer was explained to them, how it was done, and its purpose, they came to understand it and genuinely accept it.

The contemplative prayer that was used is called The Breath Prayer (Appendix C), which is a foundational practice for spiritual growth as it promotes silence and brings one's focus on God. "It is intended to be a very short prayer of praise or petition, just six to eight syllables. The words of the prayer can be easily adjusted to one's heart's desire."<sup>5</sup>

The attendees were asked to close their eyes and recite the scripture, "Be still and know that I am God" (Ps. 46:100). "The Breath Prayer is usually said silently within. Simply repeat the prayer over and over keeping your attention on the prayer. If your attention wanders, gently return to the prayer."<sup>6</sup> Group members voiced their understanding that contemplative prayer is a practice, and it gets easier over time. It was a new form of praying for them, but they looked forward to making it part of their spiritual practices.

Each class session encountered some challenges, due to the group's preconceived understanding of what grief is, what it looks like, and how one should respond. It appeared that, because they had experienced grief before and seemed to have come through on top without complication, they felt like authorities on the subject. As they spoke from their own experiences, they were limited in their understanding but overall

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5. Chris Heuertz and Phileena Heuertz, "Breath Prayer," Gravity, accessed September 14, 2021, <https://gravitycenter.com/practice/breath-prayer/>.

6. Ibid.

had a wide range of the expressions of grief. One participant even mentioned that she felt that grief is a spirit before the instructor taught on grief as an emotion from God.

To teach the group that grief is biblical, they were instructed to find passages in the Bible that showed grief. Then they were to explain to the group the grief experience in the scriptures. This was an enlightening experience for them and they found it encouraging. The teaching on Grief Indicators, Common Signs, and Symptoms of Grief was well-received. The group was eager to know how to identify grief responses in people. Overall, the study was appreciated.

### Week 1: Grief, What Is It?

This session explored the meaning, different types, and process of grief. Topics discussed included the understanding that “grief is not only normal, but also an essential aspect of [one’s] humanness”<sup>7</sup> and that it is an important experience that all human beings inevitably will experience in their lifetime.

Alan Wolfelt affirms, “Grief is not something to choose or not choose. Rather, it is in [one’s] wiring. It is the normal and necessary journey [people] embark on after something [they] have valued no longer exists.”<sup>8</sup> Also discussed was that grief comes from loss other than death, such as job, divorce, separation, abortion, rape, illness, loss of income, relationships, et al. The session closed with a presentation of J. W. Worden’s Tasks of Grief, as included on the Habits of Wellbeing website,<sup>9</sup> regarding one’s ability

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7. Carr, Nesse, and Wortman, *Spousal Bereavement in Late Life*, 195.

8. Wolfelt, “Grief.”

9. Habits for Wellbeing, “Coping with Grief and Loss: Insights into the Grieving Process,” Assessed September 8, 2019. <https://www.habitsforwellbeing.com/coping-with-grief-and-loss-insights-into-the-grieving-process/>.

to accept the loss, experience the pain, adjust to the new environment, and reinvest in the new reality.

### Week 2: Grief and the Bible

Granger Westberg says that “faith plays a major role in grief of any kind.”<sup>10</sup> Many believers, however, are made to feel that it is inappropriate to grieve based on 1 Thess. 4:13 (KJV), “But I would not have you to be ignorant, brethren, concerning them which are asleep, that ye sorrow not, even as others which have no hope.” Paul did not tell believers not to grieve but, rather, that, when Christians grieve, it is done from a place of hope. “Having faith does not preclude [anyone] from experiencing the process of grief. It means they have a relationship with God to lean onto or lean into as [they] process [their] loss.”<sup>11</sup>

This means that believers have the right and are expected to journey through grief at some point in their lives. The Bible has many instances of grief, showing how believers lived out their individual grief as well as communal grief, and how people journeyed with the bereaved in their grief.

### Week 3: Grief and Emotions

Emotions are real. Robert Brault notes, “Never let your emotions rule, but always let them testify.”<sup>12</sup> To understand grief, one must first understand what emotions are.

Emotions are psycho-physiological reactions to outward impulses; therefore, they are real

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10. James Lau, “Grief Comes in Many Forms by Granger Westberg,” My Inward Journey, May 18, 2020, <https://jameslau88.com/2020/05/18/grief-comes-in-many-forms-by-granger-e-westberg/>.

11. McBride, “What Do We Do with All This Grief?”

12. Robert Brault, “My 2013 Top Fifty,” The New Robert Brault Reader, accessed November 8, 2019, <http://rbrault.blogspot.com/p/my-2013-top-fifty.html>.

in the sense of being biological reactions, not in the sense of being metaphysical or abstract agents. Grief is the price to pay when one allows themselves to love another person or hold dear something in their heart. Emotions “are a natural instinctive state of mind deriving from one’s circumstances, mood, or relationships with others.”<sup>13</sup> Emotions are real and they reveal the state of a person’s mind. Emotions are “shaped by natural selection to cope with the adaptive challenges of the situation”<sup>14</sup> that one may be experiencing at the time.

#### Week 4: Grief Indicators, Common Signs and Symptoms of Grief, and Grief Myths and Facts

Helen Harris writes, “Congregations do an incredible job of responding to families at the time of a death. . . . Then, as families do, [they] get busy with [their] lives, things seem to return to normal, and the bereaved often face the ongoing challenges of mourning and grief with little attention or support.”<sup>15</sup> Although people grieve differently, the bereaved commonly feel depressed, confused, and disconnected. If these or other symptoms do not gradually fade or if they worsen with time, this may signify that professional support is needed.

#### **The Four-Week Grief Sermon Series**

Alongside the four-week grief study series was a four-week preaching series on grief (Appendix E). The preaching series, led by the project director, was on the healthy

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13. Definition of emotion [online]. Oxford University Press. Available at: <https://www.lexico.com/definition/emotion>, Accessed: 14 July 2019.

14. Randolph M. Nesse, “Emotions Twelve Things to Know,” The International Society for Evolution, Medicine & Public Health, accessed November 8, 2019, <https://isemph.org/resources/Site/Emotions-guide.pdf>.

15. Harris, “What Is a Congregation to Do?”

process of grieving, focused on biblical characters who experienced times of grief. The series helped participants understand that grief is a normal part of life that demands their attention.

The four-week series was preached on Sunday mornings during the 8:00 am worship service. At the time of the project, the church was predominantly African American, comprised of low- and middle-class, and blue- and white-collar members. Ages ranged from newborn to ninety-six years. Women made up most of the congregation. Sunday preaching topics were:

- Grief (what it is); John 11.
- Grief and Emotions (stages of grief); 2 Samuel 12.
- Grief and Suicide (not wanting to go on with life); 1 Kings 19.
- Grief and Supportive Relationships (and the lack thereof; how one's community can help); 2 Samuel 19.

The sermon series sparked a lot of interest in the topic. It shed light on a topic that seemed to have been taboo in the community. The sermons gave voice to those within the community who were grieving. These members offered their appreciation for addressing what they felt they could not. The sermons, presented in a teaching format, did not allow for the celebration to which most African-American churches are accustomed. Even so, the sermons offered a call to grace and an opportunity for transformative reflection. Therefore, as the sermons were shared within the congregation, attenders were more attentive to the messages and sat quietly with the intention of understanding and learning.

## **Grief Interviews**

Each session closed by watching interviews of members from different spiritual communities who shared their current or recent grief journeys. The interviewees selected for the pre-recorded interviews were on personal grief journeys of six months to one year. All interviewees had experienced the loss of their mothers. Each interview was fifteen minutes in length. The purpose of the videos was to allow the attendees to hear the hearts of the bereaved believers in order to understand that grief does not make them less of a Christian. The hope was that they would not hear the voice of a weak person but of a heart that was broken. This was so they could come to understand that the emotions of the bereaved are natural responses to loss and are experienced in a variety of ways. The interviews also helped them understand where the church community was lacking in support of those who were bereaved and what was needed to support them in the journey.

The following questions were asked and answered: Do you think that grief is a good thing or bad thing? What types of people grieve? How does grief make you feel? Have you ever grieved? Why did you grieve? How did you grieve? Talk about your recent grief journey. Does everybody grieve in the same way? Is there an appropriate time to grieve? How long should someone grieve? Does grief ever go away? How can people be released to grieve in a healthy way? What kind of support from family and friends existed as you grieved? Did you have the support of your church community during grief? If so, what did they do to be supportive? If not, what might have helped navigate the grieving process?

As the group watched the videos, it was obvious that some had been unaware of what grieving people experienced and felt. It was not because they had not grieved

themselves but because they had not experienced grief to the depth of the interviewees. At the end of the videos, the instructor asked if anyone had questions or concerns about the presentations. Two people expressed that they thought they felt the interviewees were dramatic with their grief. They felt that their grief was abnormal. The instructor expressed to them that everyone's grief looks different, and that the relationship to the deceased helps to dictate the depth of a person's grief. Also, when they assume that a person is experiencing heightened emotions or that they need to move on, this is what makes the grief journey a lonely journey. Additionally, the instructor shared that grief should never be experienced alone.

The instructor encountered some disagreement that stemmed from the ignorance of participants on the topic of grief. They were looking through lenses of spirituality without taking into account the natural human emotion that accompanies a response to life circumstances. In addition, the majority of the group was surprised to know some of the things that Christians can, do, and will experience even though they are believers with a strong commitments to God.

### **Intercession for the Bereaved**

“You are in my thoughts and prayers,” is a phrase that is often spoken among members of the church community to provide comfort to someone who has recently lost a loved one. Though they may have them in their thoughts from day to day, rarely do they follow through by praying. Prayers during times of grief and loss are uplifting and can lessen one's sadness; however, life gets busy and well-intentioned congregants often forget about their commitments to pray for the grieving family. Therefore, the Saturday following the final, four-week study session on grief, the group met together for a time of



corporate intercession to pray for the bereaved within the community. When Christians pray together in public it is called corporate prayer. Michael Lazio, Senior Pastor of Bethel House of Prayer Church, says that “The church is a house of prayer. As we assemble together, we are the corporate expression of prayer.”<sup>16</sup> The most powerful form of prayer available to the body of Christ is united prayer. The group welcomed the opportunity to pray. They had a time of corporate prayer every Saturday morning, so this addition was nothing new; rather, group members were afforded the opportunity to interject prayer intercession for those who were grieving.

Prayer was from 10:00 to 11:30 AM and was held in the sanctuary. Instrumental music played softly in the background. Each person was asked to enter the sanctuary in silence or with minimal talking and to sit on the first two rows of the middle section of the seats. The attendees were also asked to bring names of those within the community that they knew were grieving. A formal list from the church secretary was also provided. The group was reminded that the time of prayer was a sacred space where the attendees would respect, protect, and support the bereaved in their journeys through grief.

Before prayer started, twenty minutes were spent encouraging attendees on the importance of corporate and intercessory prayer. They learned that prayer is how believers keep God in their circumstances and situations. When believers go to God in prayer, they remind themselves how much they need and depend on him. Spending time with God in prayer allows believers to develop an intimate relationship with the Father, which equips one to meet life’s challenges and struggles. Prayer also allows one to grow spiritually, becoming more and more like Christ. Without the act of prayer, believers

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16. Michael Lazio, “What Is a House of Prayer?” Bethel House of Prayer, accessed April 27, 2019, <https://bethelhouseofprayer.com/about/what-is-a-house-of-prayer/>.

would never be able to make it through the many dimensions of life that they face, especially through the problems and situations that come from temptations, trials of faith, and afflictions. The teachings went over well with the participants. They were receptive as they learned more about corporate prayer. Many voiced their appreciation for these new insights in understanding how to incorporate prayer for those who are grieving, especially since several of them identified as intercessors. Following are topics covered prior to times of intercessory and corporate prayer.

### Topic 1: Corporate Prayer

One of the purposes for the sanctuary is to be a place where believers meet for corporate prayer: “My house will be called a house of prayer for all nations” (Isa. 56:7). This type of prayer plays an important part in the life of the church among believers. Corporate prayer should be genuine, real, and from the heart; it unifies the body of believers. “As [believers] regularly come together, [they are] reminded to ‘maintain the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace’ (Eph. 4:3).”<sup>17</sup> Corporate prayer also allows believers to encourage and support other believers. Corporate prayer is a conversation among believers and God.

### Topic 2: Intercessory Prayer

Intercessory prayer is the act of praying for other people. Paul instructed believers to pray, not only for their own personal needs, but for others as well:

I exhort therefore, that, first of all, supplications, prayers, intercessions, and giving of thanks, be made for all men; For kings, and for all that are in authority; that we may lead a quiet and peaceable life in all godliness and honesty. For this

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17. Jennifer Oshman, “Six Reason the Church Needs Corporate Prayer,” *Unlocking The Bible* (May 7, 2018), assessed September 14, 2021, <https://unlockingthebible.org/2018/05/six-reasons-the-church-needs-corporate-prayer/>.

is good and acceptable in the sight of God our Savior; Who will have all men to be saved, and to come unto the knowledge of the truth.” (1Tim 2:1-4)

Oftentimes in churches, prayer is relegated to a few chosen people, but Paul instructs the church to pray both individually and corporately regarding their responsibility of intercession. Paul encouraged the people of God as a body to intercede for another. Richard Blackaby notes,

God looks for those whose hearts are prepared to be intercessors before Him. Intercessors have hearts in tune with God’s heart. They are so acutely aware of what is at stake, for their land, that they will stay before God as long as necessary in order to obtain God’s answer. That is why you do not volunteer to be an intercessor. God enlists you.<sup>18</sup>

When praying for or on behalf of someone, it is known as Intercession, which means to become an advocate. Intercession is another level in prayer; it takes effort and intentionality to pray for someone else. Intercession does not refer to one’s personal communication with God.

Once the instruction was complete, another ten minutes was taken to explain how they would be praying. Afterwards, prayer started and lasted one hour. The prayer was set-up as a labyrinth, which is used for walking meditation. This way the attendees’ thoughts and prayers would truly be for the bereaved during this time. “The labyrinth is a walking meditation, a path of prayer and an archetypal blueprint where psyche meets Spirit. It has only one path that leads from the outer edge in a circuitous way to the center.”<sup>19</sup> Laid out on the floor in a circle around the sanctuary were stations where each person would stop along the way and pray for the people’s names on the poster in the

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18. Richard Blackaby, “God Is Looking for Intercessors,” Blackaby Ministries International, January 28, 2021, September 14, 2021, <https://blackaby.org/god-is-looking-for-intercessors/>.

19. Veriditas, “New to the Labyrinth?” accessed September 14, 2021, <https://www.veriditas.org/New-to-the-Labyrinth>.

area of grief using the knowledge learned in the four-week grief study. Each station was identified with a brown poster secured to the floor and included the names of the bereaved. The attendees were instructed to slowly walk with deliberate steps while quieting their minds and focusing on the bereaved in prayer. Reaching the center, they paused to reflect, pray, and listen, before exiting to absorb the experience.

The labyrinth prayer was received well. The group was used to doing some type of walking during their corporate times of prayer, so they were receptive. They also shared that experiencing God in prayer in this way was new and exciting, and they were willing to embrace it (Appendix B).

Through studies, sermons, and focused prayer, the topic of grief was shared with the community. The report now turns to an evaluation of the project outcomes.

## **Chapter IV**

### **Evaluation**

#### **Educational Impact Outcome One**

At the end of this study, the church community of HPC had learned to acknowledge that grief is the inevitable process that human beings experience due to loss at some point in their lives and that the journey of grief demands attention even in the local church community. The project's educational impact took select preachers, teachers, and leaders of the community through a four-week study of grief (Appendix D). The four-week training helped them understand that grief is a normal part of life that demands one's attention. Therefore, they discovered a desire to create sacred spaces to minister to those who are grieving. It also trained them on how to lead grief recovery groups in addition to creating sacred spaces for those who grieve. Doing so allowed the church community to create safe spaces through small groups where the community as a whole would be able to minister effectively to those who were grieving.

To measure the outcome and success of the project qualitatively and quantitatively, the control group of preachers, teachers, and leaders was administered pre- and post-assessment surveys (Appendix F). Members of the class were questioned about their knowledge of grief, their personal grief experiences, their faith as it relates to grief, and their community grief support (or the lack thereof). Statistical measurements tallied percentages of members involved in and engaged in grief support and the preaching and

teaching series. Overall, these measurements revealed increased support and acceptance among the spiritual community.

The pre-assessment survey was a set of ten questions asking twelve people, who were preachers, teachers, and leaders, their knowledge of grief, their opinions, and their critique of the way their community had previously handled, cared for, and supported those who grieved within the community. The pre-assessment survey completion rate was eighty-two percent with eleven responses. Responders typically took five-minutes to fill out the survey, and the most-skipped question was number two, which asked, “What types of people grieve?” (Appendix A).

The pre-assessment survey revealed that one hundred percent of the preachers, teachers, and leaders who took the survey had a working knowledge of grief and believed that not everyone grieves the same way. Eleven percent understood grief to be when someone loses a job, while the remaining eighty-eight percent believed that grief encompassed additional life losses such a job, pet, loved one, independence, et al. Eleven percent believed that there was an appropriate way to grieve and eighty-eight percent believed there was not an appropriate way to grieve. Fifty-five percent believed that people go on to grieve forever, thirty-three percent believed that people grieve for several months, and eleven percent believed that people grieve for several years. Eighty-eight percent found it uncomfortable to be around those who grieve, and eleven percent did not feel uncomfortable around those who grieve. One hundred percent believed that it is appropriate for Christians to grieve and had found themselves in grief at least once in

their life. Sixty-six percent said that they did have the support of their church while thirty-three percent said that they did not (Appendix A).

There was an array of answers when participants were asked, “If you did not have the support of your church community when you grieved, how did that make you feel? What would you have expected from them?” Some stated that they wished that the church had been there for them, while others said sometimes “they just have to learn to encourage themselves” referencing David as an example in the Bible. Others suggested that support comes depending on one’s “relationship with the church community” and “the church can be cliché about who they support.” They even went as far to say that they “learn not to expect anything” from the church in an effort not to get let down, which would make the grieving process “harder” for them.

The educational impact also involved the congregation in a four-week, preaching series (Appendix E) on grief and the healthy process of grieving. The sermon series allowed the congregation to learn of biblical characters who experienced times of grief. This helped the congregation to understand that grief is a normal part of life that demands attention; thus, allowing them to want to create sacred spaces to minister to those who are grieving.

After the four-week, preaching series on grief and the four-week, teaching on grief, the post-assessment (Appendix F) survey was a set of the same ten questions from the pre-assessment survey asking the same twelve people who were preachers, teachers, and leaders about their knowledge of grief, their opinions, and their critiques of the way their community had previously handled, cared for, and supported those who grieved within the community. The post-assessment survey completion rate was one hundred

percent with eleven responses of the twelve teachers, preachers, and leaders in the community. The typical time spent on filling out the survey was three minutes, and no questions were skipped.

The post-assessment survey revealed that one hundred percent of the preachers, teachers, and leaders who took the survey understood what grief is and recognized that grief is more than just the loss of a loved one. Ninety percent agreed that grief is more than just losing a loved one but that it encompassed additional life losses such a job, pet, loved one, independence, etc.

One hundred percent agreed that not everyone grieves the same. Thirty-six percent believed that there is an appropriate way to grieve while the other sixty-three percent did not believe that there is an appropriate way to grieve. Eight-one percent believed that people grieve forever, nine percent believed that people grieve for several years, and the additional nine percent believed that people grieve for several months. One hundred percent were not uncomfortable around those who were grieving (Appendix A).

The pre-assessment survey (Appendix F) exposed that the definite need for teaching and preaching within the community on grief, grief support, and grief recovery. It revealed that, though they all had experienced grief in their personal lives and had a working knowledge of grief, it was a surface-level understanding stemming from their own personal experiences. The areas that revealed an increase in understanding proved that teaching and preaching on grief provided for a more in-depth understanding of grief, of those who grieve, and of the grief recovery support needed within the community. Most of Jesus's teaching and preaching, according to William F. Brosend, "was in response to the situation, needs, traditions, politics, charges, and questions of the listeners



who gather to hear him speak.”<sup>1</sup> He notes that almost everything Jesus said came in response to and/or in conversation with someone. There was nothing off limits in Jesus’s pulpit when it came to addressing issues that affected the lives of the people to whom he preached. Jesus said, “The Spirit of the Lord is upon me, because he hath anointed me to preach the gospel to the poor; he hath sent me to heal the brokenhearted, to preach deliverance to the captives, and recovering of sight to the blind, to set at liberty them that are bruised, to preach the acceptable year of the Lord” (Luke 4:18–19). Jesus declared that one of several aspects of his mission was to preach good news to the brokenhearted (which includes the grieved). Teaching and preaching may point out sins, disobedience, doubts, but it also should remind the brokenhearted (the grieved) of the hope that is in Christ Jesus. Jesus preached so that a change would come about in the lives of his listeners.

### **Congregational Impact Outcome 2**

The project’s congregational impact was to involve ten percent of HPC members in a small, grief recovery group. One goal was to create safe spaces, such as grief recovery groups, one-on-one grief counseling, workshops, and a prayer space, in order to be present with those who grieve, worship with them, and comfort them. Another goal was to increase knowledge and awareness of the effective handling of grief in safe spaces. Post-project surveys would be given to reveal how the sermon series and small group leader training helped to impact the development of sacred spaces within HPC.

After the sermon series, the congregational impact allowed for sacred spaces to be created, such as grief recovery groups, one-on-one grief counseling, workshops, prayer

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1. William F. Brosend, *The Preaching of Jesus: Gospel Proclamation, Then and Now* (Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press, 2010), 35.

space, and intentional presence with those who grieve, worshiping with and comforting them. Statistical measurements tallied percentages of members involved, how engaged they were, and whether there was increased knowledge of the effective handling of grief in safe spaces. The post-project survey consisted of a set of five questions asking ten people who were present for the entire sermon series (Appendix G).

The post-project survey completion rate was one hundred percent, with all participants taking the survey. The typical time taken to complete the survey was two minutes. The post-project assessment revealed that everyone agreed that grief is a normal human experience, grief support is important to the healing process, the church should provide some type of grief recovery support, grief is biblical, and grief is the expression of human responses (Appendix A).

Congregations typically do an incredible job of responding to families at the time of a death, but where they lack has been in the grief support needed after the funeral and in the days to come. Preaching explored the topic in depth and helps to explain what it is, share what the Bible says about it, and how to deal with it. Jesus was not a preacher who functioned within a religious assembly. He spoke occasionally in synagogues, but he spoke mostly outdoors in the country and in small towns (small groups).

At HPC, small groups for grief recovery were created and were held once a month. Sacred spaces were created, such as grief recovery groups, one-on-one grief counseling, workshops, and a prayer space, to be present with those who grieve, worshiping with and comforting them.

A safe space is a “space that [is] comfortable and safe for both careseekers and caregivers.”<sup>2</sup> It is a place where the spiritual community can provide its members with the time, space, and permission to face their grief before God unapologetically. Without a spiritual community creating a safe place, members of the community would not be able to face their grief, nor would they provide others with the opportunity to face theirs.

Leaders within the community were trained on how to facilitate a grief recovery small group by the facilitator, a Hospice Chaplain and a Certified Grief Specialist. “The effective minister is often called upon to help individuals move through the grief process in a manner that allows for personal growth.”<sup>3</sup> Senior pastoral leaders offered one-on-one counseling and, when they ran into complicated grief issues, they referred the griever to a professional.

Sacred spaces are also places of prayer. Sacred spaces in prayer create an atmosphere of vulnerability between those who pray, those who are being prayed for, and God. It is a place where nothing is hidden from God and people can confide their most intimate cares and concerns. The community has a regular time of corporate prayer each Saturday morning from 10:00 to 11:00 AM. Within that timeframe, they have carved out time to share in prayer with and for those who are grieved. During this time, the topic of grief is prayed, and grievers can pray for themselves or allow someone to pray for them.

A bereavement ministry department (Appendix K) was created to support the bereaved in an effort to make sure that they have the permission to grieve, they are not

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2. Doehring, *The Practice of Pastoral Care*, 44.

3. Ingram et al., “Grief-Resolution Therapy in a Pastoral Context”, 69–72.

grieving alone, and they have safe space for grief recovery (Appendix I). The bereavement ministry's charge is

1. To make initial contact with the families no later than three days of hearing of the loss.
2. To mail a sympathy card within that same week.
3. Along with the card, to send a letter to inform the family of the bereavement support available to them within the community, free of charge.

Thereafter, the ministry continues by sending bereavement support letters (Appendix H) to the bereaved's family on the third, sixth, ninth, and twelfth month of the death of their loved one. At the end of each year, there will be an annual celebration of life where the community will come together with those who have lost a loved one that year and remember those they have lost (see Appendix J).

### **Conclusion**

The teaching, preaching, and experiential momentum of this project proved to be a successful approach, making a positive change to the thought process of the spiritual community as it relates to grief support and grief recovery within the community. Though there were signs of resistance to gaining a new and more in-depth understanding of grief, the community eventually became receptive and is now faithfully willing to be an active support system for those who grieve within the community. The development of this project shifted the trajectory of HPC from being a church where its members grieved individually to one that grieved communally.

## Chapter V

### Conclusion

Death is considered “evil”—it is an intrusion to life here on earth; it is an enemy to mortal existence—so naturally one tries to escape death at all costs. In the teenage horror film, *Final Destination*, a young man avoids the hand of death, only to find that he cannot get away from it so easily. On the way to Paris with his high-school French club, Alex Browning (Devon Sawa) has a vivid premonition of the plane crashing and killing all its passengers. After Alex and some other passengers demand to be let off the flight, his premonition turns out to be true, and the jet explodes during takeoff. While the FBI is convinced that Alex was involved in foul play, the passengers who got off the flight are all dying in horrible ways, as if whoever determined that the passengers would perish is punishing those who cheated death.

No one is exempt from death. Every person who rises to life through birth will surely pass from this life through death, and there will be loved ones left behind to grieve the life of the one who has died. Where there is death, there will be grief, and where there is grief there needs to be an understanding of what it is and the support needed. Jane E. Brody wrote an article in *The New York Times* titled, “Understanding Grief,” in which she states that communities “can all benefit from learning how to respond to grief in ways that don’t prolong, intensify or dismiss the pain. Likewise, those trying to help need to

know that grief cannot be fit into a preordained time frame or form of expression.”<sup>1</sup> This is because grief is not a problem to be solved or resolved. Rather, it is a journey to be taken and lived out, expressed in several different forms and for however long it may take with the support of one’s community.

Megan Devine in her book, *It’s OK that You’re Not OK*, states that “if [one] can start to understand the true nature of grief, [grievors] can have a more helpful, loving, supportive culture.”<sup>2</sup> That sentiment was the basis for the project’s teaching and preaching on the topic of grief to help the spiritual community of HPC understand the true nature of grief in an effort to provide grievors within its community the help, love, and support needed during their grief journey. The project proved successful with visible and dramatic changes. The effectiveness of the project was supported as the country experienced a nation-wide pandemic known as coronavirus disease (COVID-19) that began in the year 2020 and continues to impact the nation today.

With COVID-19 running rampant in the nation and around the world, cities and states were closed down. Except for essential personnel, most were confined to their homes, hundreds died, millions lost their jobs, homes, vehicles, stability, and the like. Businesses were shut down, schools closed, and the doors of the church were no longer open. Along with lives lost and the absence of normalcy, believers grieved without being able to attend regular worship services in person. Some responded by bottling up their emotions, while others sunk into despair. Across the nation there was a profound grief and no one escaped, not even the church community. HPC had to come to grips with the

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1. Jane E. Brody, “Understanding Grief,” *The New York Times* (January 18, 2018), 2, assessed September 14, 2021, <https://www.nytimes.com/2018/01/15/well/live/understanding-grief.html>.

2. Megan Devine, *It’s Ok That You’re Not Ok* (Boulder, CO: Sounds True, Inc, 2017), 19.

reality of grief and the immediate presence of grief within their community. The community learned what it meant to grieve collectively.

As the project was introduced to the church community, there was some hesitation and slight resistance, but, as the pandemic progressed and numerous losses were experienced within the community, the community leaned into the project's teaching and preaching. HPC came to recognize that they were on the "front lines of helping [their community] cope with the magnitude of [their] personal and collective traged[ies]. . . . It is [their] role to offer a template for what collective lament and community look like amid [grief]."<sup>3</sup> After the teaching and preaching on grief, HPC began actively creating sacred spaces and providing support to journey alongside those within its community as they grieve.

HPC learned that the people within the community needed permission, time, and space to grieve genuinely and unapologetically. Most importantly, they needed the support of their community as they journeyed through grief. They needed their church community to walk with them, sharing in their pain. HPC also recognized that the weight of grief was much lighter when it was shared with others and that having the support of those in one's community can help one to bear their grief. In the midst of the grief and anxiety, HPC showed strength and found reasons for hope as they re-envisioned their mission. This mission would allow the community to grieve together, allowing the church to be a place where no one would suffer alone or in silence, empowering the church to be a safe place where everyone's grief would be met with compassion.

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3. Adam Russell Taylor, "The Church Must Model Lament for Our Grieving Nation." *Sojourners* (February 25, 2021). Accessed September 14, 2021., <https://sojo.net/articles/church-must-model-lament-our-grieving-nation>.

This project began the process of making the community aware of the need for grief support and recovery. While it was successful, continuous teaching and preaching is needed to help the community stay aware of this ongoing need and its importance. In addition, the project potentially could have made a greater impact if more than just the preachers, teachers, and leaders participated in the four-week teaching series. The class should have been open to the entire community. Also, the teaching series would do best as a six- to eight-week, teaching series. With the depth of information, scenarios, and the questions that the participants had, there was not enough exploration time within the four weeks of teaching.

The sermon series was also effective. It helped the congregation understand that grief is not just a human emotion but that it is also biblical. When the congregants were able to see grief from a biblical perspective, they were more receptive. Though the sermon series was effective, it is also important to note that preaching on the topic of grief is not just a one-time thing. Preaching on grief should be interwoven through the year and during times of corporate grief, such as the COVID-19 Pandemic, social unrest, police brutality, and the like. The preachers within the community would need more training on how to prepare and preach sermons on grief.

The Christian language of grief is lament. As Bob Yoder, Advancement Associate at Anabaptist Mennonite Biblical Seminary, comments,

Laments are some of the richest, deepest, most intimate expressions of prayer. . . . Through lament, God invites [believers] to be honest and to fully engage [their] emotions, reminding [them] that God has broad enough shoulders to handle them and is ever present with [them]. . . . Biblical lament is “Good News” in the way



Jesus enacted his gospel salvation. It offers [believers] genuine hope for today, tomorrow and the months and years to come.<sup>4</sup>

Pamela Yoder, Pastor for Community Life and Pastoral Care, College Mennonite Church, goes further, “Laments allow [one] not only to name, express, or recall times of raw and real pain and suffering but also to remember God’s presence and care amidst even the loneliest and bleakest of times. Lament signifies a trusting relationship with God and can deepen that relationship.”<sup>5</sup> When communities are well informed about grief and grief recovery through preaching and teaching, safe spaces are created for members within the community to journey through their grief with support of the community.

As [believers] engage with biblical lament together, [the] hope is that participants will discover (or discover anew) that [the] Creator expects to hear not only [their] joy, faithfulness, and praise but also [their] deepest despair, anger, doubt, and more. Though God may weep alongside [believers] as [they] cry out in lament, God is the most equipped to receive and handle such cries.<sup>6</sup>

For all of these reasons and more, it is vitally important for spiritual communities to make space for the congregation to mourn biblically and with the needs of those within the community in mind.

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4. Bob and Pamela Yoder, “Mourning Our Losses Together During Covid-19: The Good News of Biblical Lament” (Ekhart, IN: Anabaptist Mennonite Biblical Seminary, July 21, 2021), accessed September 14, 2021, <https://www.ambbs.edu/publishing/hope-and-resilience/mourning-our-losses>.

5. Ibid.

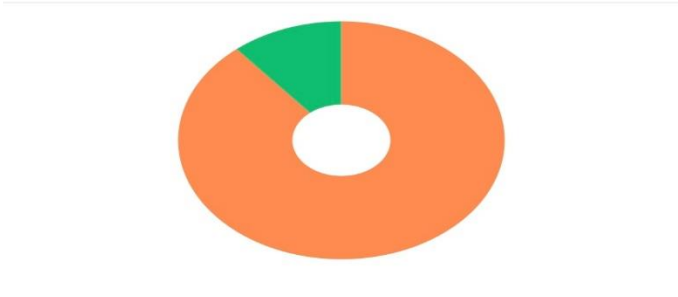
6. Ibid.

## **Appendix A**

### **Figures and Tables**

Table 4.1. [Pre] Types of Grief

2. What types of people grieve?

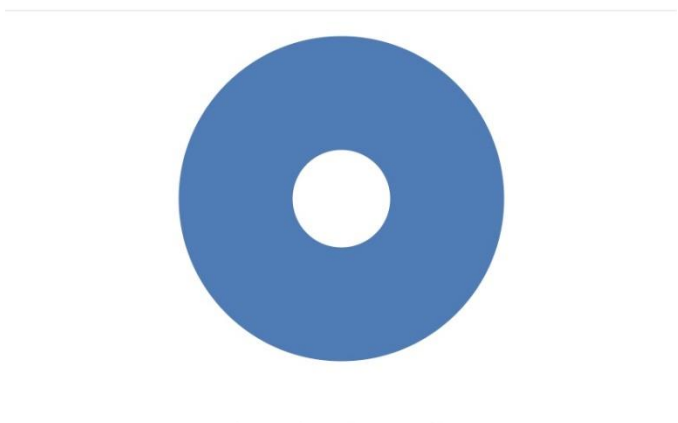


Skipped: 2   Answered: 9

Those who have lost a job	11%	1
Those who have lost a pet	0%	0
Those who have lost their independence	0%	0
Those who have lost a loved one	0%	0
All of thee above	89%	8
None of thee above	0%	0

Table 4.2. [Pre] How People Grieve

3. Does everybody grieve the same way?



Skipped: 1   Answered: 10

Yes	0%	0
No	100%	10

Table 4.3. [Pre] Ways to Grieve

4. Is there an appropriate way to grief?

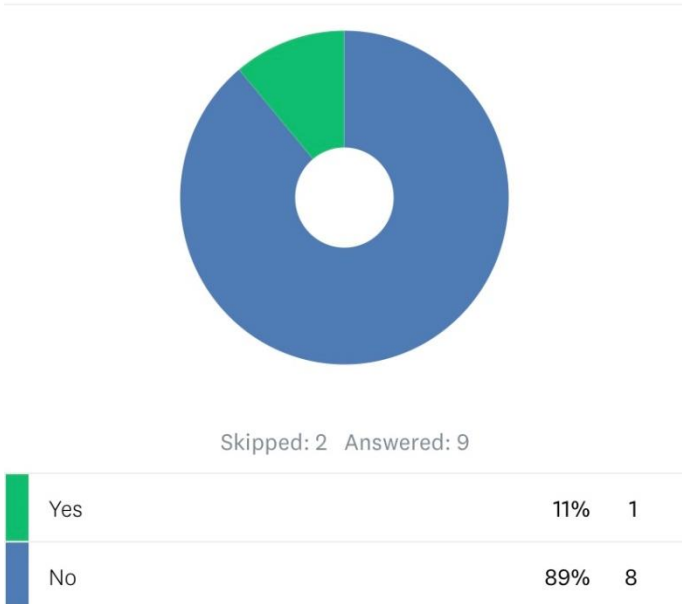


Table 4.4. [Pre] Length of Grief

5. How long should someone grief?

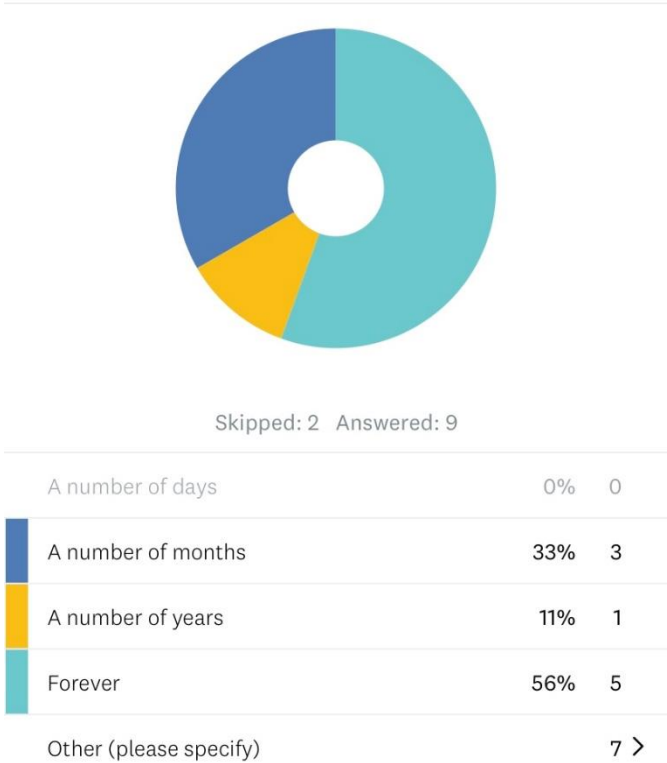


Table 4.5. [Pre] Comfort Level around Grief

6. Does it make you uncomfortable to be around someone who is grieving?

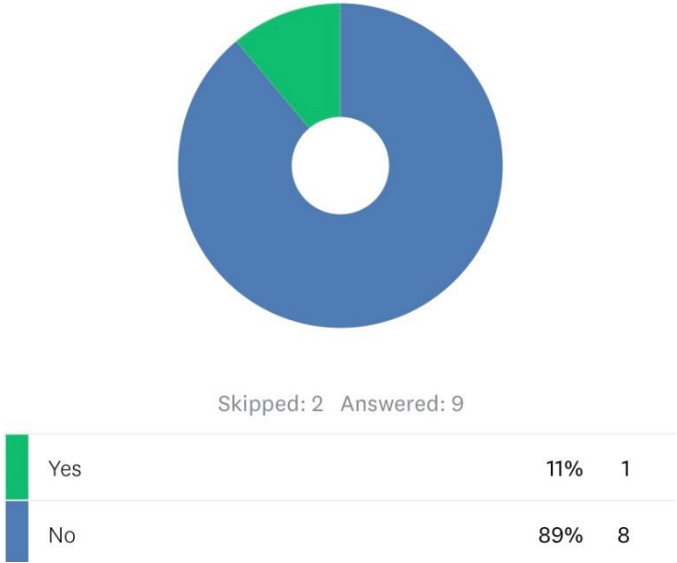


Table 4.6. [Pre] Survey of Grief

7. Have you grieved before? If you have grieved before why did you grieve and how did you grieve?

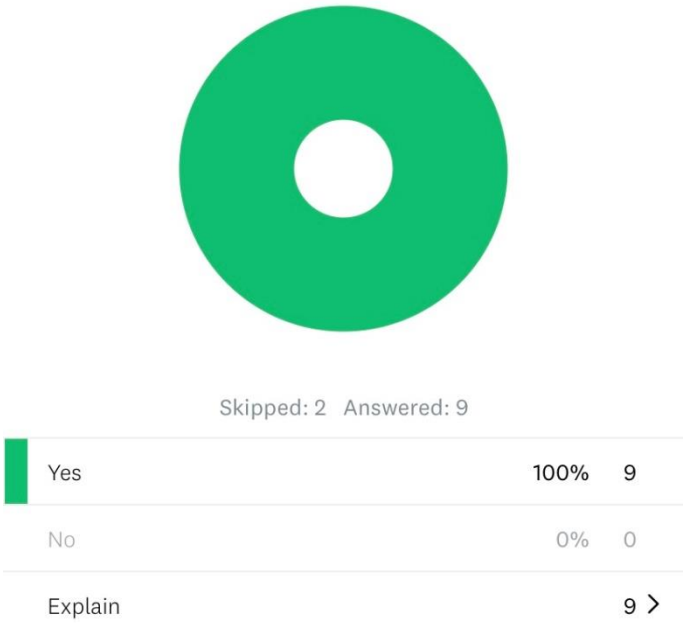


Table 4.7. [Pre] Christians and Grieving

8. Are Christians allowed to grieve?

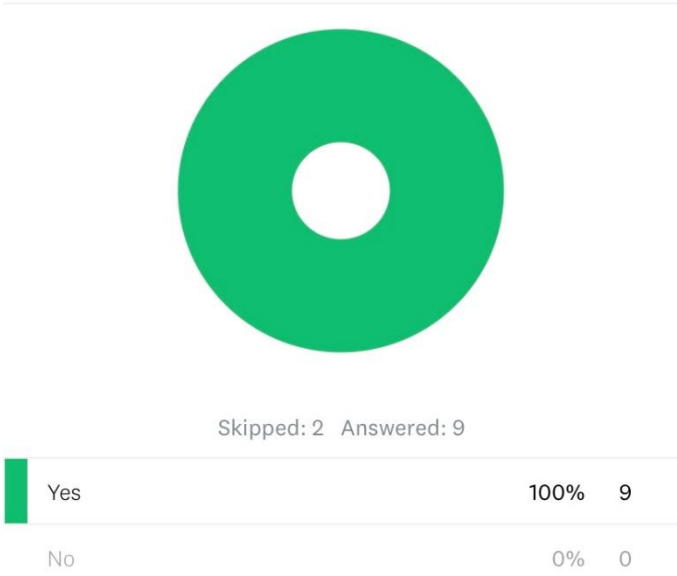


Table 4.8. [Pre] Church Support during Grief

9. When you grieved did you have the support of your church community? If you had the support of your church community when you grieved what did they do to support you?

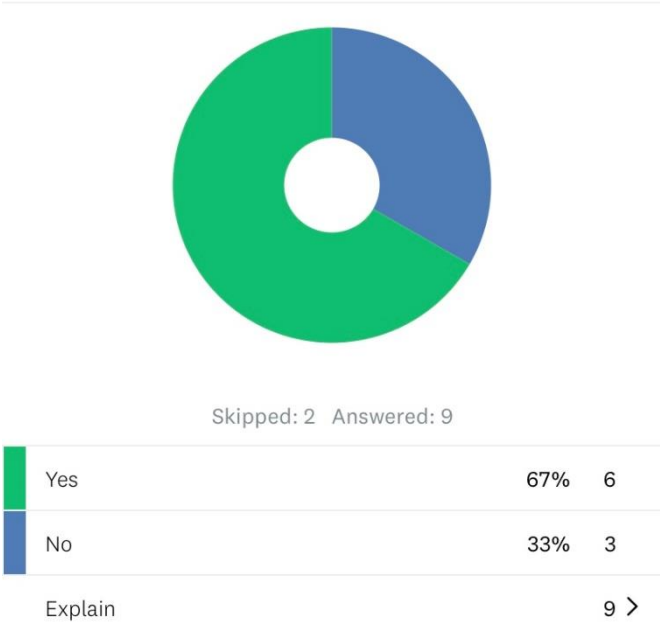


Table 4.9. [Post] Types of Grief

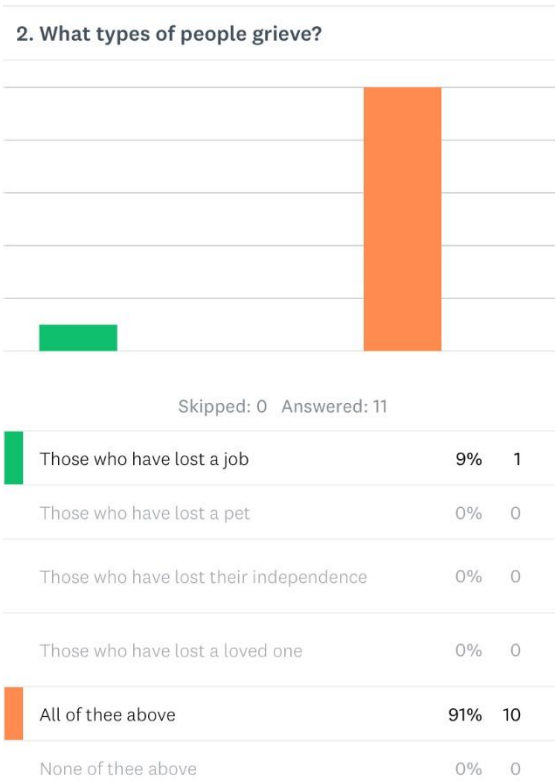


Table 4.10. [Post] How People Grieve



Table 4.11. [Post] Ways to Grieve

4. Is there an appropriate way to grief?

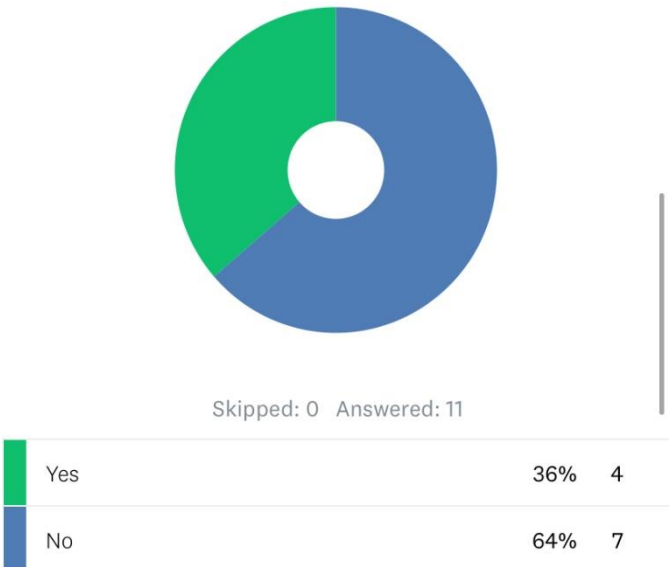


Table 4.12. [Post] Length of Grief

5. How long should someone grief?

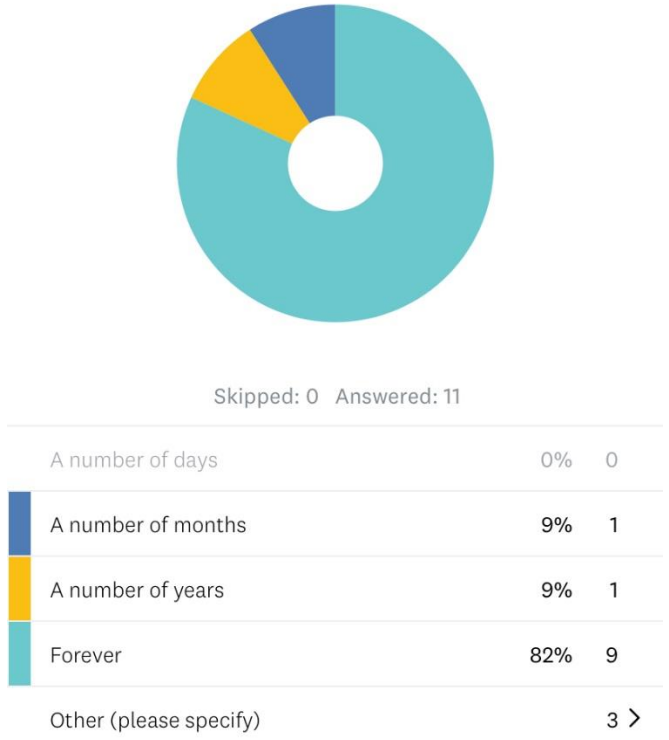




Table 4.13. [Post] Comfort Level around Grief

6. Does it make you uncomfortable to be around someone who is grieving?

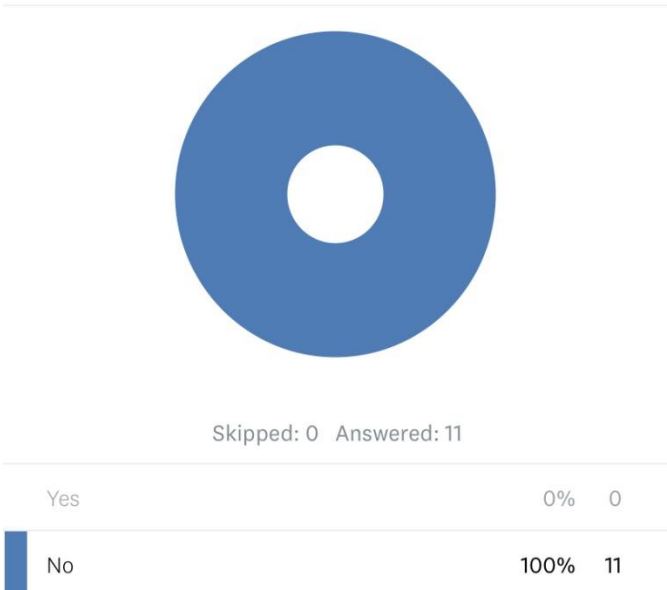


Table 4.14. [Post] Survey of Grief

7. Have you grieved before? If you have grieved before why did you grieve and how did you grieve?

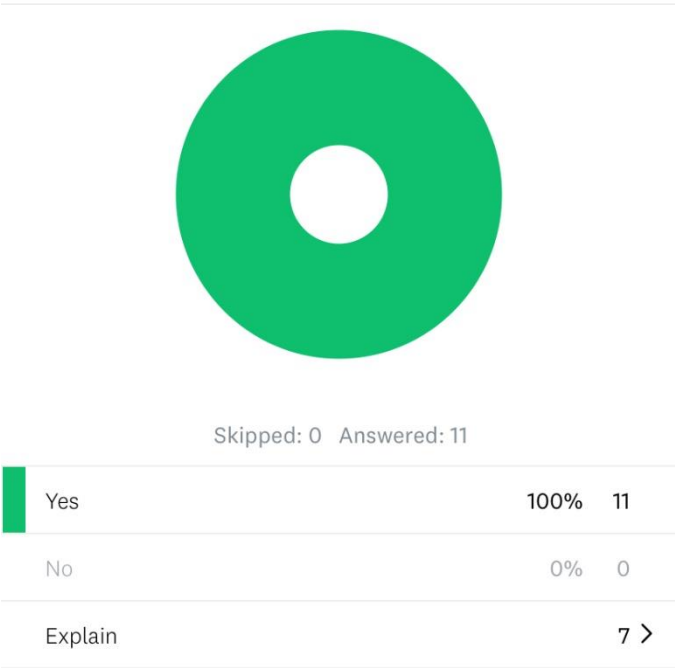
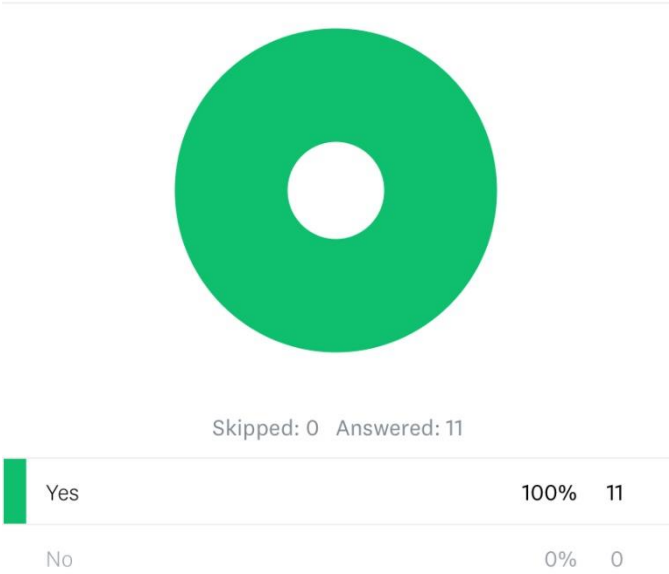


Table 4.15. [Post] Christians and Grieving

8. Are Christians allowed to grieve?



## **Appendix B**

### **Walking the Labryinth**

## *Walking The Labyrinth*

www.veriditas.org

Welcome to the Labyrinth. You are about to step into ancient archetypal path that is hundreds of years old. The pattern has been walked by millions of people of all cultures for many reasons.

The labyrinth is a sacred place set aside for you to reflect, look within, pray, negotiate new behavior. The rhythm of walking, placing one foot in front of the other, empties the mind, relaxes the body and refreshes the spirit. Follow the pace your body wants to go.

The labyrinth can be walked in four stages. As you encounter other people walking the same path, simply allow them to pass. You walk the labyrinth with your body and rest your mind.

### **Remember**

#### *Before walking the labyrinth*

Take time in gratitude be thankful for your life. Bless the people in your life. If there's a specific event or situation troubling you, bring it to mind and form a healing question if possible.

### **Release**

#### *Walking into the labyrinth*

This is the time to quiet the mind, let go of the mind chatter and release your troubles. Open your heart to feel whatever it might feel. Become aware of your breathing. Take slow breaths. Relax and move at your own pace.

### **Receive**

#### *Standing or Sitting in the Center*

This is a place of reflection. Pause and stay as long as you like. Open yourself to your higher power. Listen to that small inner voice. In the safety of the labyrinth have a heart-to heart talk with yourself.

### **Return**

#### *Walking out of the labyrinth*

When you are ready, begin walking out the same path you followed in. Walking out, integration of your experience happens. Experience the sense of well-being, healing, excitement, calm or peace.

Each labyrinth experience is different. You may feel nothing or have a powerful reaction. Whatever, listen to your heart and take all the time you need. The above description is only a thumbnail sketch. You provide the bigger picture.

**Appendix C**  
**Breath Prayer**

## BREATH PRAYER

[www.gravitycenter.com](http://www.gravitycenter.com)

Breath prayer is an ancient Christian prayer practice dating back to at least the sixth century. Historically, it is associated with the Eastern Church, particularly Greek and Russian Orthodox churches.

Known as the “Jesus Prayer” or “Prayer of the Heart,” early practitioners would repeat to the rhythm of their breath the phrase, “Lord Jesus Christ, Son of God, have mercy on me a sinner.” In time, the prayer was shortened to, “Lord Jesus Christ, have mercy” or simply, “Jesus, mercy.”

Breath prayer is a good example of “praying without ceasing” as St. Paul admonished us to do and has the potential to become as natural as breathing. It is intended to be a very short prayer of praise or petition, just six to eight syllables. The words of the prayer can be easily adjusted to your heart’s desire.

Praise is expressed by calling on one of the Divine names such as God, Jesus, Lord, Father/Mother, Christ, or Spirit. Or you may prefer another name of adoration. Your request or intention is comprised by the words following.

The breath prayer is usually said silently within. But some people sing it; others chant it. It’s your prayer; use it your way.

You may also use the breath prayer for a focused time during a daily spiritual practice. Simply repeat the prayer over and over keeping your attention on the prayer. If your attention wanders, gently return to the prayer.

Begin with 5 minutes and gradually increase the time to 15 or 20 minutes as you become disciplined with the prayer. You may want to use a timer to free yourself from watching the clock. Some find it useful to write in a journal of their experience with the prayer.

### Instruction

1. Close your eyes and recall the line “Be still and know that I am God” (Psalm 46:10). Be still, calm, peaceful, open to the presence of God.
2. With your eyes closed, imagine that God is calling you by name. Imagine that God is actually asking, “(Your name) what do you want? Like the blind man on the road to Jericho, Jesus kindly looks you in the eyes and asks, “What do you want from me?”
3. Give God a simple and direct answer that comes honestly from your heart. Write down the answer. If you have more than one answer, write them down. Your answer may be one word such as peace or love or help. It may be

several words or a phrase such as “feel your presence” or “lead me into life.” Whatever your answers, they are the foundation of your breath prayer.

4. Select the name that you are most comfortable using to speak with God. Combine it with your written answer to the question God asked you. This is your prayer.
5. Breathe in the first phrase/word (generally your invocation of God’s name) and breathe out the second phrase/word (request or need).

You may need to compose several prayers before you find one which truly arises from your deepest desire. So look carefully at your prayer. Does it reflect the heart of your desire?

There’s no limit really to developing your breath prayer. It may be the same from day to day or it may change.

Sometimes you may want to reverse the practice a bit by sitting in silence and letting the Spirit pray through you. Ask for God to reveal *your* name, and God’s desire for *you*. This can be a profound experience. You may wind up hearing something like, “Beloved, you are enough,” or “Mighty One, rest.” Wait on God and see how you may be renewed.

### **Sample Breath Prayers**

- Jesus, let me feel your love.
- O Lord, show me your way.
- Holy one, heal me.
- Jesus Alleluia, have mercy.
- Holy Wisdom, guide me.
- Father/Mother (Abba/Amma), let me feel your presence.



## **Appendix D**

### **Four-Week Grief Study Series**

## **FOUR-WEEK GRIEF STUDY SERIES**

### **Powerpoint Handout**

#### **WEEK ONE: GRIEF, WHAT IS IT!**

##### **► GRIEF, WHAT IS IT!**

- Grief is deep sorrow; it's the emotions that one feels when they have experienced a deep loss of any person, place, or thing. Grief is the human normal response that one experiences when they have deep despair. Grief is a natural emotion that one has when they have lost someone or thing that they cared for deeply.
- Bereavement is the time period of grief.
- Bereaved describes the persons who are grieving.
- Mourning is the act of sorrow; the expression of grief (influenced by cultural customs).

##### **► Grief comes from the loss of several different things:**

- Unemployment
- Loved One
- Employment
- Home
- Income
- Freedom

##### **► Grief is an important experience that all human beings inevitably will experience in their lifetime. Alan Wolfelt affirms, "Grief is not something [one] choose[s] or not choose. Rather, it is in [ones] wiring. It is the normal and necessary journey [people] embark on after something [they] have valued no longer exist.**

- Grief is a personal journey and is unique to the person who is experiencing it.
- Grief is not only normal, but also an essential aspect of [ones] humanness.

##### **► Mourning is the action that the person or persons take as a direct result of experiencing deep sorrow from a loss. How one mourns reflects one's cultural customs. Every culture has specific ways in which they express their grief.**

Mourning is about taking “the grief [one] have on the inside and express[ing] it outside [them]self.

- Another way of defining “mourning is ‘grief gone public’ or ‘the outward expression of grief.’”
- There is no one right or only way to mourn. Talking about the person who died, crying, expressing your thoughts and feelings through art or music, journaling, praying, and celebrating special anniversary dates that held meaning for the person who died are just a few examples of mourning.
- Mourning isn’t just an indication of grief, it is also a form of supplication, a prayer of petition, a prayer of intercession.

► Types of Grief

- Grief can manifest in several ways. The table shows some of the more common forms of grief.

► The Grief Process; The Tasks of Grief:

- To accept the loss
- Experience the pain
- Adjust to the new environment
- Reinvest in the new reality

## WEEK TWO: GRIEF & THE BIBLE

### ► GRIEF & THE BIBLE

- The bible has many instances of grief. It shows how believers lived out their grief and how people journeyed with the bereaved in their grief. “Following the death of a loved one, the survivors would stop all of their normal activities and mourn and fast for a period of several days. Then they would be persuaded by other family members to return to their daily routine.”
- The custom of grief was expressed most often through weeping (mourning). Grief are the emotions that one feels on the inside before, during, or after the loss of a loved one, but is not necessarily noticed on the outside by others. The bereaved is the person or persons who are experiencing deep sorrow from a loss.
- Bereavement refers to the time period of grief (the emotions one feels) and mourning. Mourning is a practice associate with the experience of the death of a loved one or tragedy. When one experiences the emotions of grief they are destined to mourn.
- “When death is mentioned in the bible, frequently it relates to the experience of the bereaved, which will normally respond immediately, outwardly, and without reserve.”
- In the Old Testament many of the psalmist expressed intense grief (Ps. 6, 35, 38, 42, 43, 88). Abraham and Isaac mourned the loss of Sarah (Gen. 23:2; 24:67). The Israelites grieved the death of Jacob (Gen. 50:10), Aaron, Moses, and Samuel (Num. 20:29; Deut. 34:8; 1 Sam. 28:3). David and his men mourned the death of Saul and his son Jonathan (2 Sam. 1:12, 17), and Jeremiah wrote songs to mourned for the death of Josiah (2 Chron. 35:25).
- In the New Testament, Jesus withdrew privately to grieve the death of John the Baptist (Matt. 14:13). Jesus openly wept with Mary and Martha at the death of their brother, Lazarus (John 11:35). Believers mourned the death of Stephen (Acts 8:2). Women wept for the loss of Tabitha in Joppa (Acts 9:39).
- Believers are made to feel that it is inappropriate to grieve based on 1 Thessalonians 4:13(KJV), “But I would not have you to be ignorant,

brethren, concerning them which are asleep, that ye sorrow not, even as others which have no hope.”

- Paul was not telling believers that they could not grieve but rather that when Christians grieve it is done from a place of hope. because of the hope they have, which goes beyond physical death, believers do not go about grieving in the same manner as those who believe that death is the end.
- Paul offered this text to help believers not to be ignorant of what happens when someone dies or how one feels, but somehow believers have still found themselves ignorant of the truth of their human expectation of grieving. Grieving was and is expected to be done from a place of hope and not from a place finality.

### WEEK THREE: GRIEF & EMOTIONS

*“How much of what we call grief is the experience of previous loss? And how do we allow such grief not to be a motivator for our life? How do we get in touch with that deep pain, that place of loss that creates a fear of life itself, our doubt in ourselves about our ability to deeply experience the world because we so fear loss and change?” ~ (Levine, 1982)*

#### ► GRIEF & EMOTIONS

- “Love and grief are two sides of the same precious coins. One does not—and cannot—exist without the other. They are the yin and yang of [human life]. . . . If [one] allow [them]selves to love, [they] must also allow [them]selves the grace of grief and mourning.” George Knight
- Grief is the price to pay when one allows themselves to love another person or hold dear something in their heart. Most commonly “grief is caused by loss of relationships. Consequently, understanding the meaning of grief must be based on an understanding of relationships” and “how they give a selective advantage.” How a person grieves is a direct reflection of the relationship they had with the deceased person.

*Grief is A Universal Experience. “To spare oneself from grief at all cost can be achieved only at the price of total detachment, which excludes the ability to experience happiness.” ~ Erich Fromm (1900-1980)*

- Robert Brault once said, “never let your emotions rule, but always let them testify”.
- To understand grief, one must first understand what emotions are. Emotions are psychophysiological reactions to outward impulses; therefore, they are real in the sense of being biological reactions, not in the sense of being metaphysical or abstract agents.
- emotions “are a natural instinctive state of mind deriving from one’s circumstances, mood, or relationships with others”. Emotions are real and they reveal the state of a person’s mind. Emotions are “shaped by natural selection to cope with the adaptive challenges of the situation” that one may be experiencing at the time.
- Your emotions are real.
- Five Stages of Grief, (Kubler-Ross, 1969). These stages of grief do not come in order. They can be applied to any form of catastrophic life losses. According to

Kubler-Ross a person simultaneously experiences two of the stages at any given time.

1. Denial: The initial stage: “It can’t be happening.”
2. Anger: “Why ME? It’s not fair?!” (either referring to God, oneself, or anybody perceived, rightly or wrongly as responsible)
3. Bargaining: “Just let me live to see my son graduate.”
4. Depression: “I am so sad, why bother with anything?”
5. Acceptance: “It’s going to be OK.”

► Complicated Grief, (Worden, 2001)

- Chronic Grief: One that is prolonged, is excessive in duration, and never comes to a satisfactory conclusion.
- Delayed Grief: Emotion that has been “inhibited, suppressed, or postponed.” A subsequent loss may elicit an exaggerated reaction because the bereaved is grieving for two losses.
- Exaggerated Grief: Occurs when feelings of fear, hopelessness, depression, or other symptoms become so excessive that they interfere with the daily existence of the bereaved.
- Masked Grief: Symptoms and behaviors experienced by a person who does not recognize the fact that these are related to a loss.

► ONGOING TRIGGERS FOR GRIEF

- During bereavement and after, many things can trigger a return to intense grief — expected things like a birthday, a holiday or the anniversary of the death. Or more subtle experiences like catching a scent of perfume or cologne that reminds you of your loved one, or the smell of their favorite food cooking. These are “grief triggers” and they can be long-term challenges.

## **WEEK FOUR: GRIEF INDICATORS, THE COMMON SIGNS AND SYMPTOMS OF GRIEF**

### ► **GRIEF INDICATORS, THE COMMON SIGNS AND SYMPTOMS OF GRIEF**

- **Shock and disbelief:** It is hard to accept a death. You may feel numb and question whether the loss really happened — this isn't unusual. Some have noted their initial reluctance to even notify others of a loss in case it turned out to be untrue. This is a normal reaction, as is still expecting someone to call or write or show up, even if intellectually you have accepted their death.
- **Sadness:** Profound sadness is a universal experience and can often lead to a feeling of aloneness or isolation. We sometimes believe that no one can understand the depth of our grief, which drives us deeper into sorrow.
- **Guilt:** You may feel guilt over things you said or did — or those you did not and felt you should have. In cases of suicide, many people question whether they could have changed the outcome somehow. Yet there is nothing that can stand in the way of death, or a final decision made by someone else, and over time we must acknowledge and accept that. Still, it is difficult to do in the early days or months of grieving.
- **Anger:** Regardless of how someone we loved died, anger often comes into play. You may be angry with the person for not being here anymore, or with caregivers for not doing more. You may blame God or others. Or you may not be able to direct your anger against a specific source, but find that every day, small injustices seem much bigger than they might have in the past. This is normal, and no one should tell you that you must stop or let go of your anger — that will happen eventually as part of your process, on your own timeline.
- **Fear:** A loss can trigger fear on many levels — fear of your own mortality, of losing those you love, of facing life without the person who has died. It can include fear of the future and the uncertainty you may now feel about your life's plans, knowing that someone close to you has died.
- **Physical pain:** We often think of grief as emotional, but it can manifest physically as well. Symptoms can include nausea, fatigue, lowered immunity, weight loss or gain, insomnia, aches, and pains and more. Although it can be quite difficult, it's important to do what you can to maintain your health during grief.

### ► **MYTHS AND FACTS ABOUT GRIEF**

- **MYTH:** The pain will go away faster if you ignore it.



- **Fact:** Trying to ignore your pain or keep it from surfacing will only make it worse in the long run. For real healing, it is necessary to face your grief and actively deal with it.
  - **MYTH:** It's important to be "be strong" in the face of loss.
  - **Fact:** Feeling sad, frightened or lonely is a normal reaction to loss. Crying doesn't mean you are weak. You don't need to "protect" your family or friends by putting on a brave front. Showing your true feelings can help them and you.
  - **MYTH:** If you don't cry, it means you aren't sorry about the loss.
  - **Fact:** Crying is a normal response to sadness, but it's not the only one. Those who don't cry may feel the pain just as deeply as others. They may simply have other ways of showing it.
  - **MYTH:** Grief should last about a year.
  - **Fact:** There is no right or wrong timeframe for grieving. How long it takes can differ from person to person. Grief doesn't go away — we just learn how to manage it differently day by day.
- **THE 10 BEST AND 10 WORST THINGS TO SAY TO SOMEONE IN GRIEF**  
(Grief.com)
- **THE BEST THINGS TO SAY TO SOMEONE IN GRIEF**
    1. I am so sorry for your loss.
    2. I wish I had the right words; just know I care.
    3. I don't know how you feel, but I am here to help in any way I can.
    4. You and your loved one will be in my thoughts and prayers.
    5. My favorite memory of your loved one is...
    6. I am always just a phone call away
    7. Give a hug instead of saying something
    8. We all need help at times like this, I am here for you
    9. I am usually up early or late, if you need anything
    10. Saying nothing, just be with the person
- **THE 10 BEST AND 10 WORST THINGS TO SAY TO SOMEONE IN GRIEF, Continued (Grief.com)**
- **THE WORST THINGS TO SAY TO SOMEONE IN GRIEF**
    1. At least she lived a long life, many people die young
    2. He is in a better place
    3. She brought this on herself
    4. There is a reason for everything
    5. Aren't you over him yet, he has been dead for a while now
    6. You can have another child still

7. She was such a good person God wanted her to be with him
8. I know how you feel
9. She did what she came here to do and it was her time to go
10. Be strong

## **Appendix E**

### **Four-Week Grief Sermon Series Outline**

## Four-Week Grief Sermon Series Outline

### WEEK 1: Grief, What Is It?

**Sermon Series Big Idea:** Having the opportunity to walk “along with someone grieving [is] a sacred trust”<sup>1</sup> giving out of a moment of vulnerability. Grief is horrible, painful, and miserable, but when communities are well informed about grief and grief recovery through preaching and teaching, safe spaces will be created for members within the community to journey through their grief with the support of their community.

**Week 1:** Grief, What is it?

**Text:** John 11:30-36 (NIV)

**Sermon Title:** Mary Go Ahead and Weep, Tell Martha to Mourn

**Sermon Big Idea:** Grief is the inevitable process that all human beings will experience as the result of a loss at some point in their life and the journey of grief demands attention. “Having faith does not preclude [anyone] from experiencing the process of grief. It means they have a relationship with God to lean onto or lean into as [they] process [their] loss.”<sup>2</sup> Which means believers have the right and are expected to journey through grief at some point in their lives.

### Points

1. Grief Happens when there is a loss.
  - a. Weeping is a human experience.
  - b. Jesus’ Weeping demonstrated that He was human.
2. Grief individually should be experienced corporately.
  - a. Mary wept, Martha mourned in the presence of the community who wept and mourned with them.
  - b. Jesus wept
3. Grief effects even the best of us.
  - a. The rage he felt against the tyranny of death over mankind.
  - b. Weeping expresses the sorrow, sympathy, and compassion Jesus felt for all mankind.

**Conclusion:** The song “Mary Don’t You Weep” is an old African American spiritual. The song tells the Biblical story of the exodus of the Israelites from Egypt, where they had been held in bondage for at least two hundred years, and Mary of Bethany and her distraught pleas to Jesus to raise her brother Lazarus from the dead. When enslaved sang “Mary Don’t You Weep,” they were reminded that God rewards his believers. The song stressed that resurrection was promised, but it also focused on the idea that God protected

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1. McBride, “What Do We Do with All This Grief?”

2. Ibid.

his people and punished their enemies. The message of the song is “Don't despair”. It wasn't telling believers that they could not feel the normal human emotions that comes with loss.

## WEEK 2: Grief and Emotions

**Sermon Series Big Idea:** Having the opportunity to walk “along with someone grieving [is] a sacred trust”<sup>3</sup> giving out of a moment of vulnerability. Grief is horrible, painful, and miserable, but when communities are well informed about grief and grief recovery through preaching and teaching, safe spaces will be created for members within the community to journey through their grief with the support of their community.

### Week 2: Grief and Emotions

**Sermon Text:** 2 Samuel 12:15-22

**Sermon Title:** Let Your Emotions Testify!

**Sermon Big Idea:** Grief is an important experience that all human beings inevitably will experience in their lifetime. “Grief is an emotion that deserves respect and reverence—almost a sacred feeling which we hate to see distorted by other, more human emotions.”<sup>4</sup> Alan Wolfelt affirms, “Grief is not something [one] choose[s] or not choose. Rather, it is in [ones] wiring. It is the normal and necessary journey [people] embark on after something [they] have valued no longer exist.”<sup>5</sup>

### Points:

1. David’s grief expressed several types of emotions
  - a. To understand grief, one must first understand what emotions are. Emotions are psychophysiological reactions to outward impulses; therefore, they are real in the sense of being biological reactions, not in the sense of being metaphysical or abstract agents. Emotions “are a natural

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3. McBride, “What Do We Do with All This Grief?”

4. Benda, “Bereavement and Grief Work,” 2.

5. Wolfelt, “Grief.”

instinctive state of mind deriving from one's circumstances, mood, or relationships with others".

- b. Emotions are real and they reveal the state of a person's mind. Emotions are "shaped by natural selection to cope with the adaptive challenges of the situation" that one may be experiencing at the time.
- 2. Grief has 5 stages and David expressed at least three of them.
  - a. According to Kubler-Ross a person simultaneously experiences two of the stages at any given time.
    - i. Denial - The initial stage: "It can't be happening."
    - ii. Anger - "Why ME? It's not fair?!" (either referring to God, oneself, or anybody perceived, rightly or wrongly as responsible)
    - iii. Bargaining - "Just let me live to see my son graduate."
    - iv. Depression - "I am so sad, why bother with anything?"
    - v. Acceptance - "It's going to be OK."
  - b. These stages of grief do not come in order. They can be applied to any form of catastrophic life losses.
    - i. David grieved his sin
    - ii. David grieved the anticipation of his child's death.
    - iii. What form of catastrophic life losses have you experienced?
- 3. David's emotions weren't understood by others.
  - a. Grief is not linear. It doesn't start strong and then taper off with time. Rather it is like a storm, that grows smaller or larger in the same day, and often within hours.
  - b. Ongoing triggers for grief.

**Conclusion:** Robert Brault once said, "Never let your emotions rule, but always let them testify". Managing your emotions isn't the same as suppressing them. Ignoring your sadness or pretending you don't feel pain won't make those emotions go away. In fact, unaddressed emotional wounds are likely to get worse over time. And there's a good chance suppressing your feelings will cause you to turn to unhealthy coping skills. It's important to acknowledge your feelings while also recognizing that your emotions don't have to control you.

### **WEEK 3: Complicated Grief**

**Sermon Series Big Idea:** Having the opportunity to walk “along with someone grieving [is] a sacred trust”<sup>6</sup> giving out of a moment of vulnerability. Grief is horrible, painful, and miserable, but when communities are well informed about grief and grief recovery through preaching and teaching, safe spaces will be created for members within the community to journey through their grief with the support of their community.

#### **Week 3:** Complicated Grief

**Sermon Text:** 1 Kings 19:1-4

**Sermon Title:** Take a Deep Breath

**Sermon Big Idea:** Complicated Grief is when you are completely overwhelmed with grief. You are constantly thinking about the death, worry about what “could have”

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6. McBride, “What Do We Do with All This Grief?”



happened, and obsessively avoid any reminder of the death. Grief, if not dealt with it could result in complicated grief.

**Points:**

1. Elijah's grief caused him to separate himself from people.
  - a. People intentionally isolate due to feelings of anger, sadness, mistrust, helplessness, anxiety, and depression.
  - b. People withdraw from others to cope with their grief or to avoid negative judgement.
2. Elijah's grief caused him to pray ineffectively.
  - a. People who are grieving find it hard to communicate their feelings in prayer.
  - b. Communication ones emotions in prayer can go a long way toward finding a place of healing within themselves.
3. Elijah's grief caused him to fall into depression.
  - a. The person experiencing complicated grief can result in self-destructive behavior, suicidal thoughts, drug abuse, abnormal fears, nightmares, and even the emergence of underlying psychiatric disorders
  - b. This type of grief is best diagnosed by clinicians. Those afflicted with complicated grief typically need counseling to return to normal and avoid developing a mental illness.
  - c. Complicated grief symptoms often interfere with normal daily functioning and with the person's ability to find meaning and purpose in life.

**Conclusion:**

According to Healthyplace.com, breathing, something every person does automatically, [and] can improve mental health. It's the advice heard around the world: take a deep breath. (A Simple Breathing Exercise Creates Serenity) We hear about deep breathing so frequently that we have quite nearly become deaf to it, our selective hearing tuning it out. Why is Deep Breathing Good for Mental Health? Intentional deep breathing improves mental health by relaxing both the body and the mind. Taking slow, deep breaths increases oxygen in our bloodstream and thus in our brain. Deep breathing signals the parasympathetic nervous system to activate and thus induce relaxation throughout the body. When we pause to breathe deeply, our heart rate slows, and our blood pressure decreases. All this positive activity increases our wellbeing. When our body relaxes as we breathe deeply, our sense of stress is diminished. We feel fewer negative emotions, and our mind becomes quiet, [and] our thoughts [become] still. Breathing deeply reduces feelings of stress, anxiety, and depression. Deep breathing calms people frustrated by the challenges of life. While deep breathing doesn't cure mental illness, it calms people and in so doing increases mental health.

## WEEK 4: Grief and Supportive Relationships

**Sermon Series Big Idea:** Having the opportunity to walk “along with someone grieving [is] a sacred trust”<sup>7</sup> giving out of a moment of vulnerability. Grief is horrible, painful, and miserable, but when communities are well informed about grief and grief recovery through preaching and teaching, safe spaces will be created for members within the community to journey through their grief with the support of their community.

### Week 4: Grief and Supportive Relationships

**Sermon Text:** 2 Samuel 19:1-8

**Sermon Title:** Can I Lean On You?

**Sermon Big Idea:** Within spiritual communities many believers will face and have faced the inevitable process of grief that human beings experience as the result of a loss, whether it be the loss of a job, relationship, house, loved one, pet, or even finances. Those who grieve need the support of their communities as they journey through their grief.

### Points:

1. You should all keep their antennae out to sense the need for pastoral care in others.
  - a. Joab provided pastoral care to King David
  - b. King David provided pastoral care to the soldiers.
2. The Challenges of providing pastoral care can be challenging and both overwhelming and rewarding at the same time.
  - a. It is more than just showing up at different occasions, but it is to invest in those persons that one is leading and caring for.
  - b. Your support is not about what they want but about what they need at the time to support them on the grieving journey.
3. Your grief affects the relationships around you.
  - a. David’s grief affected the grief of the soldiers.
  - b. Individual grief needs corporate support especially when the entire community is affected in the loss.

**Conclusion:** "Lean on Me" is a song written and recorded by American singer-songwriter Bill Withers. He wrote it after he had moved to Los Angeles and found himself missing the strong community of his hometown. Withers is quoted “The consistent kind of love is that kind that will make you go over and wipe mucus and saliva off somebody’s face after they become brain-dead,” he said. “Romantic love you only wanna

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7. McBride, “What Do We Do with All This Grief?”

touch people because they're pretty and they appeal to you physically. The more substantial kind of love is when you want to touch people and care for them when they're at their worst." He assures the person who is suffering that he will be there for them when they need him.

## **Appendix F**

### **Grief Training Class Pre- and Post-Assessment Survey**

### Grief Training Class Pre and Post Assessment Survey

Community Feedback Survey on The Topic of Grief: We want to discover what grief means to members of the church community, how they have experienced grief, and how they respond to grief in order to establish a specific baseline for the project.

1. What is grief?

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2. What types of people grieve?

- ☐ Those who have lost a job
- ☐ Those who have lost a pet
- ☐ Those who have lost their independence
- ☐ Those who have lost a loved one
- ☐ All the above
- ☐ None of the above

3. Does everybody grieve the same way?

- ☐ Yes
- ☐ No

4. Is there an appropriate way to grieve?

- ☐ Yes
- ☐ No

5. How long should someone grieve?

- ☐ A number of days
- ☐ A number of months
- ☐ A number of years
- ☐ Forever

Other (please specify

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6. Does it make you uncomfortable to be around someone who is grieving?

- ☐ Yes  
☐ No

7. Have you grieved before? If you have grieved before, why did you grieve and how did you grieve?

- ☐ Yes  
☐ No

Explain

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8. Are Christians allowed to grieve?

- ☐ Yes  
☐ No

9. When you grieved did you have the support of your church community? If you had the support of your church community when you grieved what did, they do to support you?

- ☐ Yes  
☐ No

Explain

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10. If you did not have the support of your church community when you grieved how did that make you feel? What would you have expected from them?

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## **Appendix G**

### **Grief Sermon Series Post Assessment Survey**

### **Grief Sermon Series Post Assessment Survey**

Congregational Feedback Survey On The Topic of Grief : We want to discover the congregation's understanding of grief after the four-week Grief Sermon Series.

1. Is grief a normal human response after a loss?

- ☐ Yes
- ☐ No

2. Is grief support important to the healing process of grief?

- ☐ Yes
- ☐ No

3. Should the church community provide some type of grief support?

- ☐ Yes
- ☐ No

4. Is grief biblical?

- ☐ Yes
- ☐ No

5. Is grief expressed through human emotions?

- ☐ Yes
- ☐ No



**Appendix H**  
**Bereavement Letters**

## **Bereavement Letters**

### **Follow-up Bereavement 1 Month Letter**

Dear Family of

You have recently experienced the death of your loved one, and the funeral or memorial service is likely over. Those who came from a distance have gone home. Friends nearby seem to be getting back into their usual routines again. For you, however, life is anything but normal.

Maybe the reality of it all has yet to even sink in. If this is the case for you, know that a sense of numbness and disbelief can help you survive your early grief; it lets you absorb the impact in small portions. There is little time in the first weeks to tap into your grief anyway. Business matters need to be settled, phone calls made, and thank you notes written. In spite of so much to do it is important to be realistic in the expectations you have for yourself. Be patient and work at a reasonable pace, as you are likely worn out.

Also be aware that when emotions are running high, tensions and misunderstandings between family members can easily surface. There may be disagreements over how to divide your loved one's possessions, or irritation with the different way each person expresses his or her grief. This demands a spirit of tolerance and cooperation by all.

Lastly, don't forget that taking care of yourself is extremely important at this time for the sake of your physical and emotional health. If you were involved in the care of your loved one, you may have put your own needs on the back burner. Review the enclosed Survival Guide for Early Grief and post it in a prominent place as a reminder to make self-care a priority in the days and weeks ahead. You owe it to yourself! May you be blessed with health and peace in this time of fresh grief?

With warm regards and blessings,  
Bereavement Coordinator

### Follow-up Bereavement 3 Month Letter

Dear Family of

A short period of time has passed since the death of your loved one, and you may be experiencing a profound sense of loss. The saying by Kahlil Gibran, “Love knows not its depth until the hour of separation,” is certainly true.

Many factors affect how you grieve, including the relationship you had with the person who died, the circumstances of the death, the degree to which your routines and roles have been altered, and other current stresses in your life. Also, because we each have different personalities, backgrounds, and experiences, no two people will grieve in the same way. So don’t be hard on yourself if you go through this differently than others. Instead, treat yourself kindly. Ask for what you need, cry when you want to, rest often, take walks, drink plenty of fluids, and remember to do the thing you find comforting.

The intense pain of grief will eventually ease, even though that may be impossible to believe right now. In the meantime, there are things you can do to help yourself feel less overwhelmed and distressed by it. Gaining knowledge and insight about the grief process is one step that can make a difference. To assist you, we have enclosed some information to help you better understand and accept your experience.

You may find solace in calling upon God or a higher power – through prayer, meditation, writing, walks in nature, or reading for inspiration. Maya Angelou, well-known author and poet, once said, “It is this belief in a power larger than myself and other than myself that allows me to venture into the unknown and even the unknowable.” May you be sustained by a source beyond yourself during these days of mourning.

With warm regards and blessings,  
Bereavement Coordinator

## Follow-up Bereavement 6 Month Letter

Dear Family of

Because we know how challenging the journey through grief can be, we are attempting to provide support and guidance through the Grief Support Mailings you are currently receiving. We will continue to send regular mailings up to the one-year anniversary of your loved one's death unless you wish for us to discontinue them. If that is your preference, please let us know, and we will honor your request.

You are most likely experiencing an array of emotions that may change often, depending on the hour of the day. The most important thing to remember is that your feelings aren't right or wrong, good or bad. They just are. And, for the benefit of your emotional and physical health it's important to let feelings out rather than hold them in. This can be particularly challenging for those persons, more often men, but not always, who have been conditioned to keep their feelings hidden.

Talking to a supportive friend is an excellent way to release your feelings, but there may be times when you're upset, confused, or anxious to talk to someone else. Or perhaps it's 2:00 a.m. and you're tossing and turning in bed, finding no relief. During such times writing may provide an outlet.

Enclosed are some helpful hints for writing in a journal. For instance, one suggestion is to forget about proper spelling and good grammar, as a private journal is yours alone. No one else will read it or grade it! There is wisdom in this Chinese proverb: "Sorrow, like the river, must be given vent lest it erode its bank." May you have strength and courage to seek outlets for your grief.

With warm regards and blessings,  
Bereavement Coordinator

## Follow-up Bereavement 9 Month Letter

Dear Family of

A number of months have passed since the death of someone close to you. With each day or week that passes, you are more and more aware of the ways your life has been impacted. After all, your loved one left behind a place that is not easy to fill, and this void speaks to the important place they had in your life.

Regardless of whether your loss was a spouse, partner, parent, sibling, or child, you are being required to make certain adaptations, learn new skills, or assume responsibilities you may know little or nothing about. “Grief changes the rules, and sometimes rearranges the combinations,” says Martha Whitmore Hickman. And how true that is!

Maybe you have become the chief cook when you only did the dishes before. Perhaps you have had to make decisions about financial matters that were previously left to your loved one. If the person who died was typically the host for family get-togethers, you may be trying to take on that job now. Such changes and adjustments usually create some degree of stress, and it can be made worse if there are additional crises to manage.

Take time today to sit down, sip a cup of tea, and make a list of the various changes and adjustments you’ve experienced in recent months. Then, fill out the enclosed worksheet that relates to the stress you may be feeling. While you can’t escape all the pressures in life, or completely eliminate the strain felt as a result, you can seek ways to manage the stress. Life coach, Maureen Killoran, says, “Stress is not what happens to us. It’s our response to what happens. And response is something we can choose.” May you take one step today toward easing the stress that has come with change.

With warm regards and blessings,  
Bereavement Coordinator

### Follow-up Bereavement 12 Month Letter

Dear Family of

We would like to take this opportunity, as you approach the one-year anniversary of the death of your love one to acknowledge this important milestone in your journey of grief. You have experienced many feelings during this past year as you have learned to adapt and cope with your loss. As you continue, our prayer is for you is that your journey will be peaceful and that you will find more days of relief and joy as time passes.

Our Bereavement Ministry program of regular contact with the family members of our members is designed to offer healing support throughout the first 12 months following death. However, we trust that the relationship we have built will continue and we will remain available to assist you. Our door is always open to you. To help yourself progress toward healing continue to listen to your feelings, accept what cannot be changed, do something each day that nourishes your spirit, give of yourself to others, enjoy the confidence you are gaining, keep trusting in a higher power and don't hesitate to seek professional counseling if you think it could be beneficial.

Regardless of where you find yourself, try not to put yourself on a timetable. The journey through grief doesn't have a calendar or a specific destination. While things will never be the same, you will gradually adjust and heal. Eventually, you will be able to embrace past

memories, even as you live fully in the present and look forward to a life of renewed meaning and purpose.

We offer this blessing based on a passage from the Hebrew Scriptures:

*May the Spirit bless and take care of you.*

*May the Spirit show kindness and have mercy on you.*

*May the Spirit watch over you and give you peace.*

With warm regards and blessings,  
Bereavement Coordinator

P.S.

Sometimes as healing from loss occurs, people express a desire to volunteer their time to help others. Reaching out and giving of ourselves to others often speeds our healing. If you wish to volunteer some time in the Bereavement Ministry to support other grievers, please contact us. We would be happy to have you.

## **Appendix I**

### **Bereavement Support Group Invite Letter**



### **Bereavement Support Group Invite Letter**

Dear Family of

After the loss of a loved one, we experience a wide variety of feelings and emotions. The ever-changing emotions we experience with grief can catch us off guard, causing us to act out of character, or differently than our typical personality and demeanor.

We all need a support system to help us as we move through our grief journey. While family and friends are vital, unless they have experienced a close personal loss, they most likely don't fully "get it." That is where support groups can become a valuable resource. Grief support groups offer companionship and understanding from others who have experienced a similar loss and are experiencing the similar challenges that living with grief brings.

In a culture that often avoids talking about loss, support groups give you the opportunity to share your story openly and guilt-free. You also have the opportunity to hear the stories of others and talk about coping day-to-day, as well as on the most difficult days of our grief journeys.

We provided a general support group for those who have experienced the death of a Loved One and for those who are dealing with Anticipatory Grief. Participants will explore within a trusting and nurturing environment their reactions to loss, learn about the grieving process, develop strategies for coping and begin to integrate this life change into

their lives, in order to continue to live productive lives. There is **NO FEE** to participate in the bereavement support group meetings.

You and your family members are welcome to join us. Below please find the schedule for the year with the day, time, and place. For more information, please contact our office.

With warm regards and blessings,  
Bereavement Coordinator

### **Bereavement Support Group Schedule**

<b>MONTH</b>	<b>DAY</b>	<b>DATE</b>	<b>TIME</b>	<b>LOCATION</b>
January	Wednesday	5 <sup>th</sup>	10:00am – 11:30am	BLDG - B
February	Wednesday	2 <sup>nd</sup>	10:00am – 11:30am	BLDG - B
March	Wednesday	2 <sup>nd</sup>	10:00am – 11:30am	BLDG - B
April	Wednesday	6 <sup>th</sup>	10:00am – 11:30am	BLDG - B
May	Wednesday	4 <sup>th</sup>	10:00am – 11:30am	BLDG - B
June	Wednesday	1 <sup>st</sup>	10:00am – 11:30am	BLDG - B
July	Wednesday	6 <sup>th</sup>	10:00am – 11:30am	BLDG - B
August	Wednesday	3 <sup>rd</sup>	10:00am – 11:30am	BLDG - B
September	Wednesday	7 <sup>th</sup>	10:00am – 11:30am	BLDG - B
October	Wednesday	7 <sup>th</sup>	10:00am – 11:30am	BLDG - B
November	Wednesday	2 <sup>nd</sup>	10:00am – 11:30am	BLDG - B
December	Wednesday	7 <sup>th</sup>	10:00am – 11:30am	BLDG - B

## **Appendix J**

### **Celebration of Life Invitation**

Celebration of Life Invitation

# ANNUAL CELEBRATION OF *Life*

Please join us for a luncheon to celebrate the life of your loved ones who passed away this year. The luncheon will be held in the church fellowship hall on Wednesday, December 7<sup>th</sup> from 11:30am to 1:30pm.

During our time together you will be able to meet and greet with the Bereavement ministry team members and the church staff along with others who have also lost a loved one this past year. After a time of memorial celebrations lunch will be served and there will be a balloon release in honor of your loved one. You will also be able to learn more about other bereavement support opportunities that are made available to you as long as you need it.

Please R.S.V.P. no later than Monday December 5<sup>th</sup> by contacting our office at \_\_\_\_\_ or by emailing \_\_\_\_\_



*All are welcome!*

**Appendix K**  
**Bereavement Care Plan**

### **Bereavement Care Plan**

- Initial Sympathy Card/Letter And/or Phone Call
- Standard Bereavement Form Letters
- Memorial Service Invitation
- Holiday Cards

#### **Interventions:**

- Assess The Family's Initial Grief Response
- Offer Support to Meet Identified Needs
- Educate On Grief Process and What To Expect During This Phase

#### **Goals/Outcomes:**

- Bereaved Will Experience Normal Grief Reaction
- Bereaved Will Integrate Loss into Their Lives In Meaningful Ways
- Bereaved Will Express Grief Related Feelings/Adjustments Appropriately

**Appendix L**

**Project Narrative Proposal**

## **Development of a Safe Space for Grief Recovery through Preaching and Teaching at Humble Praise Center**

### **Project Narrative Proposal**

The subject of this study is the development of a safe space for grief recovery and how preaching on the topic of grief helps to nurture safe spaces that will allow the people within the community of Humble Praise Center (HPC) the opportunity to journey through their grief with the support of the community. Observation has revealed that there is a lack of knowledge and understanding about the meaning of grief, the importance of grief recovery, and the support needed in the community of HPC. Several members and leaders within the community have faced the inevitable process of grief that human beings experience as the result of a loss, whether it be the loss of a job, relationship, house, loved one, pet, or even finances. As they journeyed through their grief, the observation was that they were not allowed the time, support, or space for grief recovery. As a result, the need for a congregational safe space and healthy response for grieving was recognized and is the basis for this project.

Grief involves a series of stages, such as denial, anger, bargaining, depression, and acceptance. If one is to heal, one must give oneself the permission to acknowledge pain and to allow self to navigate through the process of grief. Not only must permission be granted, but those who are in community must also give the permission to grieve. Giving someone the permission to grieve is one of the most valuable gifts one can give. It is understood that in order to heal, permission must be granted from both oneself and the



community of which one is a part, but rarely are people allowed the necessary space to journey through grief within the church community. If one avoids the feelings that come with a loss, it will only prolong the process of grieving, and overlooked grief has the potential to lead to complications such as chronic depression, anxiety, substance abuse, and health challenges. Grief has its own timetable; there is no way to rush its process.

### **Ministry Setting**

Humble Praise Center (HPC) is located in the Humble, Texas. The church is predominantly African American and is comprised of low- and middle-class, blue- and white-collar members. Many of the members live locally in Humble and the Northeast Houston area, commuting five miles or less to the church. HPC services are uniquely timed for a one-hour worship experience so families can get back to their busy lives. The church does not have a weekly Bible studies, Sunday school classes, or small group meetings. There is only the Sunday morning worship service that lasts one hour. The church tried to initiate a weekly Bible study in 2018, but it was not supported by promotion (weekly announcements) or attendance by the pastor or leadership team. This led to low attendance and an increase in the cost of rental space because of the lack of offerings being picked up midweek. Therefore, Pastor Joshua Scott made the decision to cancel the Bible study.

Pastor Scott believes that family is the key component to one's spiritual journey. He states, "Far too often we have seen members of the church lose their families because they dedicated too much time to the church." The pastor's vision and plan are that no person under his leadership will be overwhelmed but instead will be able to enjoy the pleasures of being a part of HPC. Though the vision of the church is geared toward

promoting family as a key component to one's spiritual journey, there are no resources to help support families through grief recovery when someone has lost a family member or experienced a tragic event. HPC gives its members time to live their busy lives with their families, but, when one loses a family member, there is no support to help them recover from their grief in order to live into a new normal without their loved one.

Grief is horrible, painful, and miserable. Most people do not have the slightest idea how grief feels until they have gone through it. HPC does not currently have a sacred space for grief recovery or an effective working knowledge on how to minister to those who are grieving within their community. The pastor preaches thematic monthly series. One of these future series will include a four-week sermon and Bible study series on the topic of grief. A key component of the series will be to produce a community where no one suffers alone or in silence, which will empower the church to be a safe place where grief is met with compassion.

### **Project Outcomes and Measurable Assessment**

The first outcome is to discover what grief means to members of HPC, how they have experienced grief, and how they respond to grief in order to establish a specific baseline for the project. The expectation associated with this outcome is that there has been no thought or work in this area within the HPC community. This outcome will be measured by use of a specific survey. As an additional step to find out what grief recovery or the lack of it looks like in the HPC community, field interviews will be conducted with members who have experienced grief to find out what they did to heal, whether their congregation supported them, and if so, what they did.

The second outcome is complete a four-week preaching series on grief and the healthy process of grieving, and a four-week Bible study series taught alongside the preaching series in order to address the lack of knowledge and insight surrounding this topic. In addition to showing biblical characters who experienced times of grief, these series will help them to understand that grief is a normal part of life that demands their attention. Sunday preaching topics to explore will be Grief (what it is) John 11. Grief and Emotions (stages of grief) 2 Samuel 12. Grief and Suicide (not wanting to go on with life) 1 Kings 19. Grief and Supportive Relationships and the lack thereof (how one's community can help) 2 Samuel 19. The Bible study topics will go in-depth on the topic preached the Sunday prior, reiterating the message while discussing application. To measure the impact of the sermon and study series, a small grief recovery group will be formed to provide seven to twelve people with sacred spaces for grief recovery and additional understanding of grief.

The final outcome is show increased knowledge on how to effectively care for those who are experiencing grief and how to create safe spaces for grief recovery. The measurement for this outcome will include pre- and post-project surveys that will reveal how the sermon series, the Bible study series, and the small grief recovery group affected the knowledge base of the HPC community. The expectation is that one new sacred space for continued grief recovery group and one-on-one grief counseling, in order to be present with, worship with, and comfort those who grieve, will be developed and ready

for ministry, producing a community where no one suffers alone or in silence, which will empower the church to be a safe place where grief is met with compassion.

### **Relevant History of Humble Praise Center**

Humble Praise Center (HPC) was planted in 2006 on the Northeast side of Houston, Texas, a predominantly black and Hispanic low-income community. There has only been one pastor during its twelve years of existence. Pastor Scott is heavily involved in the local community as it relates to youth and empowering families by creating workshops, seminars, after-school programs, and more. He believes that “a life committed only to helping oneself is a life that is underutilized.” Though the pastor is involved in giving and supporting the community, the church has been challenged to maintain and grow membership since its inception. The observation is that the pastor appears to be more business-minded rather than relational as a shepherd, building relationships with the people of the community of HPC. While one can find much information on the Internet about him as a preacher, philanthropist, professional, and philosopher, there is little information about the church, its values, or history. HPC is a community friendly and supportive organization, but it lacks relationships—connecting with the people to know and understand their needs and concerns.

HPC is designed for the working family. The services are uniquely timed for a one-hour worship experience, so families can get back to their busy lives. The service format is identical each Sunday morning. The service opens with a prayer, the praise team sings three songs, there is altar prayer, and then a fifteen- to twenty-minute sermon, invitation to Christ, offering, then announcements and benediction.

HPC's vision is that each member of the community will have the opportunity to enjoy the pleasures of ministry. Their mission is to disciple people into a personal relationship with Jesus Christ, motivated by loving, learning, and living with purpose.

### **Relevant Personal History of Ministry**

The call to Christ came after being drawn to salvation through Christ's loving kindness in April 2003. From the moment of salvation, study of God's word began along with the ability to understand scripture through intense study and research. The capability to teach and explain scripture to others developed along the way. Teaching a Sunday school class started the same year, which progressed to leading a young adult Bible study. The call to preaching ministry came in May 2005 while lying in bed trying to take a nap when the voice of the Lord was heard saying, "Are you ready to preach?" With a humble and willing spirit, the answer was "Yes!" A few second later, the answer changed to a resounding "NO!" after the realization settled in. It was too late, however, as the Lord took "Yes!" as the final answer.

On March 6, 2006, a confession was made to Bishop Roderick Johnson, pastor. Then, on February 4, 2007, at New Beginning Church Supernatural, under the leadership of Bishop Johnson, the first sermon was preached. In the course of the year, between accepting the call and actually preaching, the project director had undergone a thorough training with the pastor. During the tenure at New Beginning Church, preaching opportunities came several times a year on Sunday mornings, as well as teaching Bible studies on Wednesday nights.

In 2009, membership was changed from New Beginning to New Destiny Praise and Worship Center (formally New Hope Community Church), under the leadership of

Dr. Ethan W. Ogletree Sr. Here, an official license to preach the gospel was issued, and full-time ministry ensued for six years as Associate Pastor. This involved leading the staff and other leaders to develop and purposefully drive the various ministries of the church in alignment with the mission and vision of New Destiny. Duties included serving as the lead pastor in the absence of the senior pastor, welcoming visitors and new members, cultivating relationships, managing the spiritual needs of members of the church, and assisting with the growth of the ministry's programs. Preaching was done during Sunday morning worship services, Bible study services, women's conferences, leadership workshops, and more. In 2016, ordination was achieved.

During the course of twelve years of preaching ministry, opportunities came to preach at women's conferences, prayer breakfasts, prayer conferences, funeral services, pastoral anniversaries, and institute revivals. This calling aligned with a heart for missions, locally and globally. Other ministry involvements included organizing clothing drives for the Trinity Mission School (Save-A-Child) in Kenya, Africa, partnering with a low-income apartment complex to feed families during the holidays, and coordinating financial resources to be given out to different ministries in need of assistance. In September 2015, the project director traveled to Africa to participate in missionary work at Maween House, a nonprofit organization located in Kenya, East Africa. The mission of Maween House is to provide for the complete needs of orphaned and destitute children between the ages three and seven years old.

A complete dedication of life has been given to serve God and His people, which is driven by a passion to teach, mentor, and intercede for God's people in order to meet their needs. Known among peers as a woman after God's own heart and a woman

purposed and destined to carry the gospel to those who are lost, the desire is to increase daily in wisdom, stature, and favor with God and man. A down-to-earth personality attracts young adults and walking alongside them is allowed, which results in helping them to navigate them through life challenges with spiritual concepts. Mentoring single adults is another area of service, helping them to trust and lean on God in their waiting seasons, and sharing with them wisdom and knowledge gained through personal life experiences with the guidance of the Holy Spirit.

The project director earned a Bachelor of Arts in Organizational Speech Communications from Texas Southern University in December 2011 and a Master of Divinity degree in May 2014 from Houston Graduate School of Theology. Summer 2014 included studying abroad at The Hebrew University of Jerusalem in Israel. Studying Coexistence in the Middle East was combined with experiencing the challenges of human diversity overseas where civilizations, religions, and cultures converge.

The passion for preaching is ignited by a fervent belief in God and his word. The relationship and experience with the goodness of God has resulted in a joy inside that yearns to be shared with the world. Driven by the passion for preaching, the proclamation of the word of God to his people is done in an effort to edify the saints and to enable them to become Christ-like people. This preaching passion inspires regular study of the scriptures and application of the discipline of hermeneutics to understand what God is saying to his people through the text. It is this passion for preaching that supports standing with the confidence of knowing God's meaning, the commitment of seeing it personally applied, and a sense of being in the presence of God. Ultimately, inner belief

echoes Paul's own, "For though I preach the Gospel, I have nothing to glory about, for necessity is laid upon me. Yea, woe is unto me if I preach not the Gospel" (1 Cor 9:16).

The goal for the preaching ministry is to be developed into an anointed and effective preacher of God's word, in an effort to lead people into a relationship with Jesus Christ that will transform their lives into Christlikeness. The plan is to accomplish this goal by continuous devotion to Christ in a relationship that allows living to be Christlike by maintaining a teachable spirit, by ongoing education in the preaching ministry, and by submission to those in leadership for guidance, mentorship, edification, encouragement, and accountability.

### **Theological, Biblical, and Historical Perspectives**

Initial research to develop the Project Proposal uncovered relevant information regarding the topic of grief and the lack of support among the Christian community. Findings will be shared in support of the decision to make the proposal. The foundational belief of grief among the Christians in the community of HPC will be explored through further research.

Grief is an important experience that all human beings inevitably will experience in their lifetime. Alan Wolfelt affirms, "Grief is not something we choose or not choose. Rather, it is in our wiring. It is the normal and necessary journey we embark on after something we have valued no longer exist."<sup>1</sup> Grief is the price to pay when one allows oneself to love another person or hold dear something in their heart. As George Knight writes, "Love and grief are two sides of the same precious coins. One does not—and

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1. Wolfelt, "Grief."



cannot—exist without the other. They are the yin and yang of [our] lives. . . . If we allow ourselves, we must also allow ourselves the grace of grief and mourning.”<sup>2</sup>

Grief and its various journeys are a familiar theme throughout the course of the Bible. The Old Testament includes the examples of Job, Naomi, David, and Jephthah. New Testament examples flow from the stories of Jesus, Mary and Martha, Jairus, and Prophetess Ana. Knight describes biblical grief, “Following the death of a loved one, the survivors would stop all of their normal activities and mourn and fast for a period of several days. Then they would be persuaded by other family members to return to their daily routine.”<sup>3</sup> The custom of grief was expressed by the tearing of clothes (Gen 37:34), taking off their sandals and walking barefoot (2 Sam 15:30), throwing dust on their heads (Josh 7:6; 1 Sam 4:12; 2 Sam 1:2; 13:19; Neh 9:1), and/or covering their heads (Esth 6:12; Jer 14:4), and some would pull out their own hair (Ezra 9:3) as a sign of their emotional distress. Charles Brand and co-authors add, “They might refrain from washing and other normal activities (2 Sam 3:31). . . . Women wore black or somber material (2 Sam 14:2).”<sup>4</sup> Men wore sackcloth and ashes, which Knight details, “This material was woven from goat and camel hair or some other rough fiber such as hemp. The discomfort associated with wearing clothes made of such rough cloth symbolized the anguish and turmoil of those who had lost love ones. See also 1 Kings 21:17-27; 2 Kings 19:1; Esth

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2. Wolfelt, “Grief.”

3. Knight, *The Illustrated Guide to Bible Customs and Curiosities*, 87.

4. Brand, Draper, and England, *Holman Illustrated Bible Dictionary*, 691.

4:1; Job 16:15; Jon 3:5.”<sup>5</sup> Sometimes fasting was a part of the grieving process, “Weeping was then, as now, the primary indication of grief.”<sup>6</sup>

Another custom during the biblical grieving process was the gift of food, but food could not be prepared in a house that was considered “unclean by the presence of the dead . . . food, however, was brought by friends”<sup>7</sup> (Jer 16:7). The community understood the importance of caring for the grieving people’s physical nourishment. Malkie Janowski observes, “It is an act of kindness to attend to the needs of mourners, as they are usually not up to normal daily activity and are meant to use the time of mourning as a period of reflection and grieving, without the distractions of ordinary life.”<sup>8</sup> At the same time, the community also cared for the grieving people’s spiritual relationship with God.

In the New Testament, Jesus mourned (Mat 14:10-13, 26:38-39, Jn 11:35; Mk 3:5; Lk 22:42-44). Jesus mourned (the outward response to grief) the life of his cousin, John the Baptist, when He found out that Herod beheaded him (Mat 14). Jesus’s grief is the price He had to pay because He loved John. The depth of one’s love is directly related to one’s grief. As He began to grieve the news of John’s death, “He separated Himself from the multitude, He extricates Himself from society, and withdraws into the depths of solitude.”<sup>9</sup> He withdrew from the crowd of people and ministry to a private place to have some time to process His emotions. “Matthew does not suggest why Jesus seeks to be

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5. Knight, *The Illustrated Guide to Bible Customs and Curiosities*, 28.

6. Brand, Draper, and England, *Holman Illustrated Bible Dictionary*, 691.

7. Ibid.

8. Janowski, “Is It Appropriate to Bring Food to a Family in Mourning?”

9. David Thomas, *The Gospel of Matthew: A Homiletical Commentary* (Grand Rapids, MI: Kregel Publications, 1979), 1.

alone at these times, but John's death is an indication . . . it is not unreasonable to believe that the"<sup>10</sup> Jesus is experiencing the grief of John's death. Though He was experiencing deep, powerful, intense hurt, He was not given much time alone to mourn. He was not given much time to "acknowledge the reality of the death"<sup>11</sup> and "embrace the pain of the loss."<sup>12</sup> The demand of the people caused him to overlook His need for grief and to attend to the needs of the people. "As soon as the miraculous feeding was completed (immediately), Jesus ordered his disciples back into the boat to precede him to their next destination. Few people went up on the hilly terrain overlooking the lake. Nothing grew there, and the roads used lower-lying routes. So Jesus [would] be assured of solitude up on a mountainside above the site of the feeding."<sup>13</sup> Taking time to escape from a world of pain and distress to a world of serenity through solitude, one is able to allow the grief and anxiety of life to fade away.

Bruce Barton writes, "Far from feeling impatience and frustration toward [the] needy people, Jesus had compassion on them. . . . While Jesus had hoped to be alone . . . He did not send away [the] needy crowd. He had compassion for the people and took it upon himself to meet their needs."<sup>14</sup> The crowd took no thought of how Jesus felt losing someone whom He loved dearly; they were only concerned about what He could and would do for them. This same type of lack of caring for people's well-being still exists

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10 Stanley Hauerwas, *Matthew* (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Brazos Press, 2006), 1.

11. Wolfelt, "Grief."

12. Ibid.

13. Stuart K. Weber, *Matthew*, Holman New Testament Commentary, ed. Max Anders, vol. 1 (Nashville: Broadman & Holman, 2000), 221.

14. Bruce B. Barton, *Matthew* (Wheaton: Tyndale House Publishers, 1996), 288-89.

today in the local Christian community. It was not until after Jesus fed the people spiritually and physically that He was able to get a few hours alone before His disciples were in need of His help.

Jesus was not afforded the opportunity to lament the loss of His cousin, John the Baptist. He was expected to go on with His life and ministry as if nothing had happened. The problem was that, while His life and ministry work on earth needed to go on, it did not go on the same as if He had not experienced a life-changing event. As both divine and human, Jesus had a human experience when He heard of the death of John. Grief becomes a part of one's life in all aspects. One must "learn to live with it and integrate it into [their] continued living."<sup>15</sup> The truth is that once one experiences a loss, life takes a shift, and all of life and how one lives life is seen and done from a different perspective. As Wolfelt puts it, "Healing is not returning to an old normal but rather creating a new normal."<sup>16</sup> Grief is not a bad thing in the big picture, because it has the ability to offer something positive in life, allowing for a fresh perspective on life moving forward.

Not only do Christians need permission, time, and space to grieve genuinely and unapologetically, but they also need the support of their communities as they journey through their grief. They need their church community to walk with them, sharing in their pain. The weight of grief is much lighter when it can be shared with others. Having the support of those in one's community can help one to handle the grief of loss. In the biblical text, grief was an important experience, so much so that professional mourners were hired to mourn along with the family and friends of the deceased love one (Eccl

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15. Wolfelt, "Grief."

16. Ibid.

12:5; Am 5:16, Mt 9:23). When Christians grieve together it allows the church to be a place where no one suffers alone or in silence, empowering the church to be a safe place where everyone's grief is met with compassion. Knight reminds, "When Job's friends came to comfort him because of the losses he had suffered, they mourned with him for seven days and seven nights (Job 2:13)."<sup>17</sup> Job's friends did not speak a word but simply supported their friend in his grieving process.

Having the permission, time, and space to grieve is a valuable part of the grief journey that each believer should be afforded to experience. Walter Brueggemann and Steve Frost note the significance of grieving or lamenting,

Christians, when [they] lose lament [they] lose more than the journey of a full human experience. When [they] skips lament altogether, heading straight for prayer, [they] fail to identify with Jesus Christ, who is not only [their] savior and the son of our creator God but was also fully man, walking the same earth [they] do. The man who suffered more than any of us fathom. And [they] lose the depth and goodness of the gospel.<sup>18</sup>

Not only did Jesus experience grief, but He was acquainted (familiar or knowledgeable) with grief and all the emotions that follow. His identification with grief offers comfort in times of bereavement. As He said, "I will not leave you comfortless: I will come to you" (Jn 14:18). Fully experiencing the pain of loss most often through one's outward emotions will provide relief. Every human being will experience pain in this life, but, in a way, the pain of grief is a gift because it is evidence of the presence of love.

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17. Knight, *The Illustrated Guide to Bible Customs and Curiosities*, 2.

18. Walter Brueggemann and Steve Frost, *Psalmist's Cry: Scripts for Embracing Lament* (Kansas City, MO: House Studio, 2010), 12.

### **Project Overview**

To summarize, when communities are well informed about grief and grief recovery through preaching and teaching, safe spaces will be created for members within the community to journey through their grief with support of the community. The scope of this project is to assist the community of HPC to understand the importance of grief recovery and to support others through journeys of grief. This includes facilitating the creation of sacred spaces within the church where no one suffers alone or in silence, empowering the church to be a safe place where everyone's grief is met with compassion.

Steps to achieve the project's goals and objectives include: 1) reading, reflecting, engaging others, and responding to grief studies, 2) interviewing church leaders on their grief experience within the church, and 3) using Internet resources and movies (e.g., *Shawdowlands*) to help support the participants' understanding of grief support.

### **Preliminary Project Resources**

Following initial research of grief and grief recovery, the researcher was drawn toward the work of a variety of authors. First are books on gaining knowledge and understanding of grief. Granger E. Westberg's book, *Good Grief*, is about the different stages of grief, whether the grief is for the death of a loved one, the loss of a marriage, or the loss of a job. This book helps the grieved to understand that what they feel is normal. Dennis Klass, Phyllis R. Silverman, and Steven L. Nickman are editors of *Continuing Bonds: New Understandings of Grief: Series in Death Education, Aging, and Health Care*. This book helps to expand the knowledge of grief and demonstrates that a healthy understanding of grief enables one to maintain a continuing bond with their loved ones. Dennis Klass's book, *Continuing Bonds in Bereavement: New Directions for Research*

*and Practice: Death, Dying, and Bereavement*, reviews grief in various cultural settings and shows how new cultural developments like social media change the ways people relate to those who have died.

Second, other sources taught how to support people through their grief journey; for example, Wayne E. Oates's, *Grief, Transition, and Loss: A Pastor's Practical Guide*, Creative Pastoral Care and Counseling Series. The topics in this book range widely and offer insight into the process of grief in many aspects of life. It offers a great place to start when thinking about pastoral care, creating safe sacred spaces for grief, and growing a grief recovery ministry. Worden J. William's book, *Grief Counseling and Grief Therapy: A Handbook for the Mental Health Practitioner*, teaches one how to treat people who are struggling with managing grief. It is organized in a way that allows one to quickly implement effective strategies when working with bereavement. Worden sets forth his tasks of mourning and becoming mediators of grieving. This book informs those who are embarking on grief therapy without previous experience. While it does not list specific techniques, it assists the caregiver better to see where the grieved person may be on the journey and provides the thought processes needed to best walk with the grieved.

Third, the following books on community provide information on what a community is, what it looks like, and how it can be achieved. They capture the essence of true fellowship. Jerry Bridges's book, *True Community: The Biblical Practice of Koinonia*, shows the importance of the community of Christians and its application on every aspect of the Christian life. David A. Teutsch's book, *Spiritual Community: The Power to Restore Hope, Commitment, and Joy*, offers practical solutions to challenges congregations commonly face making themselves into spiritual communities. Larry

Yang's book, *Awakening Together: The Spiritual Practice of Inclusivity and Community*, gives step-by-step counsel about how to work with the deep pains of grief, not simply as individuals, but as a collective. He not only covers the how-to needed for caregivers but also provides the details of collective history of the efforts that have been made to create a more inclusive and beloved community. Larry Crabb's book, *Becoming a True Spiritual Community: A Profound Vision of What the Church Can Be*, is full of personal anecdotes and metaphors gleaned from classic and contemporary literature on the disciplines of spiritual formation. There is also a thorough discussion guide at the end of the book that will prove itself valuable for a group study. Thomas G. Long's book, *The Good Funeral: Death, Grief, and the Community of Care*, helps the brokenhearted find their way again, providing ideas to design funerals that affirm faith, manage grief, and "by getting the dead where they need to go, get the living where they need to be."<sup>19</sup>

### **Procedural Outline and Timeline**

Following is the projected timeline for development of the project:

- A.** Meet with support group (August 2021)
- B.** Present plan proposal to Humble Praise Center's Elder Board (August 2021)
- C.** Examine past and current philosophy of grief support for the preacher and congregation (August 2019)
- D.** Develop a questionnaire for measuring knowledge of grief and their understanding of the importance of the pastor having permission to grieve (August 2021)
- E.** Develop a small group to educate the leadership team on the grief process (August 2021)
- F.** Develop a small grief recovery group with trained leaders from the leadership team that meet weekly or bi-weekly for a period of four to six weeks with ten to

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19. Thomas G. Long, *The Good Funeral: Death, Grief, and the Community of Care* (Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox Press, 2013), 237.



twelve people. The main group targeted for this study would be Generation X and Generation Y (August 2019)

- G.** Confirm applicants who wish to participate in the program by personal interview (August 2021)
- H.** Implement small groups to educate the leadership team on the grief process (September 2021)
- I.** Develop a four-week preaching and teaching series on grief and the healthy process of grieving, in addition to showing biblical characters who experienced times of grief (September 2021)
- J.** Conduct field interviews (October 2021)
- K.** Meet with small group leaders (October 2021)
- L.** Administer the second questionnaire to evaluate the increase of grief knowledge (October 2021)
- M.** Evaluate project and write research paper (October 2021)
- N.** Projected Graduation Date: (May 2022)

### **Organizational Structure and Resources for Project Report**

Chapter I, Introduction, will state the problem within the project's context, which is the lack of understanding of the importance of grief recovery in the local church. The problem was realized during personal experience of not being allowed the time and space to grieve. As a result, the need for a congregational safe space and healthy response for grieving was recognized and became the basis for this project. The proposed or envisioned solution to the problem is to create sacred spaces within the church where no one suffers alone or in silence, empowering the church to be a safe place where everyone's grief is met with compassion. The measurable outcomes will be acquired via the use of questionnaires, surveys, and attendance reports.

Chapter II, Research, will include a variety of sections from the following list: biblical (2 Sam 12:11-19; John 11:31-35; Ecc 3:1, 4a; Matt 14:1-13), theological, philosophical, historical, ecclesiastical (denominational), and theological foundations of the project, as relevant to the topic, including the segments mentioned in this proposal

and as determined by the research—for example, small group teaching, sermon series, and effective administration of small group teaching.

Chapter III, Action, will show evidence of what was done during the project itself, where the project was carried out, by whom, why, how, and when. The topics that will be researched will be grief and the effective support of grief recovery.

Chapter IV, Evaluation, will report what evaluation tools were employed to measure the statistical data, both qualitative and quantitative. These will include observations and summaries from pre- and post-project surveys that will reveal the number of leaders trained in the grief recovery process, their level of understanding of grief, and how to lead small grief recovery groups before and after training using surveymonkey.com. Statistical measurements will tally percentages of members involved and engaged in grief support and the preaching and teaching series. Statistical measurements will reveal increased support and acceptance among the congregation and the pastor of the grieving preacher.

Chapter V, Conclusion, will include learning, what could be done differently in future attempts, the next steps, and benefits to others.

### **Project Accountability**

Permission for the project to begin will be received from the Senior Pastor of Humble Praise Center. The Project Advisory Team will consist of the Henri Williams, DTh, Chaplain for Star of Hope Women's Shelter, and Lilly Thomas, MDiv, Chaplain for St. Luke's Hospital.

### **Project File**

The project file will contain surveys and composites of grief assessment and a summary of the findings. The curriculum for training, small group program, and sermon series will be included as resources for the Project Report Appendix. Monthly reports will be submitted to the supervisory team accounting the progress of the project and record keeping of these documents. Documentation of individual and group meetings with project advisory team members will continue until the project is officially underway. Action items will be included to keep record of particular stories and events along the way.

The project's vision is that it will accomplish the purposes set forth herein. There is eager anticipation of the measurements of outcomes and final results and a hopeful looking forward to what will be learned through this process.

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